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The Politics and Philosophy of an Education in Virtue

by

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics

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Declaration

Some of the material in the early parts of Chapters One and Six of this thesis was submitted previously in part completion of an MA in Political Philosophy (The Idea of Toleration) from the University of York in September 1995. The remainder of the thesis has not previously been submitted for the award of a degree from any institution. Everything contained herein is, except where otherwise attributed, the original work of the author.

Abstract

This thesis addresses issues in philosophy, politics and education. Its starting point is a review of some of the theoretical and practical approaches to the moral education of children that have achieved popularity in the last three or four decades of the twentieth century. Despite areas of evident divergence amongst these approaches, it is argued that they nonetheless share similar philosophical underpinnings. Building upon some initial criticisms of these positions, the thesis subsequently explores some of the more recent philosophical challenges they have faced. From this basis, a broadly Aristotelian model of moral thought and practice is discussed and advocated across two chapters. This account pays particular attention to the role of the affective domain and the ‘education of the emotions’.

In the second half of the thesis, the focus moves towards the political suitability of this preferred conception of the nature of morality and moral education. It is argued that the essential interdependence of moral development and the moral character of political society - such a central part of Aristotle’s account - is ill-appreciated by much popular and academic comment of recent times. By means of a discussion of the distinction between skills and virtues, *techne* and *arete*, the possible consequences of a full appreciation of this interdependence are debated. The remaining two chapters address two ways of answering the question which arises: “Can we have a true education of the virtues in the political context of contemporary pluralist societies?” In the first of these chapters, the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre is considered as an exemplar of the negative response to this question. In the second, some contemporary examples of liberal political thought are interrogated in the hope of discovering a positive response. It is concluded that the so-called ‘liberal perfectionism’ of Joseph Raz provides us with some reason to think that such a response may be both legitimate and attractive.

Preface

In these times as in others, education is commonly alleged to have failed our children. This failure is thought to take many forms, evidenced variously by the shifting economic performance, political culture and moral standards of our society. In this thesis I will primarily address one of these issues – relating to moral education – but will be concerned to investigate how our hopes here are affected importantly by the influence of the political and economic shape of society. As we will see, it is far from clear that the regeneration of all of these areas of concern can be accomplished simultaneously, if at all.

In the first part of the thesis, I will focus attention upon the philosophy of moral education. Chapter One provides a critical review of three theoretical approaches that have sought to guide our practice in this area in response to the changing nature of contemporary developed societies. Impressed by the breakdown in the last three or four decades of an apparently broad social consensus about moral values, these approaches have all seen this development to necessitate a radical revision of our traditional efforts at morally educating the young. In their different ways, Values Clarificationism, Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive developmentalism, and John Wilson's 'moral components' approach have all attempted to accomplish this revisionary task. By means of a discussion of the roots or underpinnings of these theories in twentieth century analytic philosophy (notably that of RM Hare) I will claim that, despite certain important differences, all three share important areas of commonality. This, I will charge, equips them all with a merely partial appreciation of the nature of moral thought and practice and renders them ineffective as approaches to moral education.

Chapter Two begins a search for alternative philosophical foundations for moral education, all of which show promise of elucidating those aspects of thought and practice which were elided by the ideas considered in the first chapter. I consider three broadly defined sources of an alternative view. The first of these, 'analytic' critique, encompasses both the so-called

‘naturalist’ views of Hare’s contemporaries such as Philippa Foot and Peter Geach, and the more recent moral ‘cognitivist’ or ‘realist’ work in the British tradition as represented notably by John McDowell and David Wiggins. In the second category I discuss recent examples of moral philosophy from Charles Taylor, Bernard Williams and Alasdair MacIntyre which may be considered more as ‘historicist’ than analytic. And thirdly, I turn to those such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, whose criticisms of neo-Kantian moral philosophy of the kind represented by Kohlberg and Hare are built upon an analysis of gender difference in moral thinking, leading to the articulation of ‘an ethic of care’. From these discussions, I will investigate the way in which we may wish to undermine one of the chief assumptions of contemporary moral education theory, concerning the role of moral principles, and develop an alternative account based instead upon an appreciation of moral particularity.

Across the next two chapters I seek to develop and defend a broadly Aristotelian understanding of moral thought, practice and education. I will be concerned to stress those aspects of this understanding which have been ignored by many contemporary moral educationalists; namely judgement, moral ‘perception’ and the role of the emotions. These help to comprise an account of the development of virtue in children. Importantly, I consider ways in which this account is in some ways difficult to reconcile immediately with the dominant social and political practices of contemporary states. This prepares the ground for the reflections contained in the second part of the thesis.

In this part I move away from the defence of a philosophical account of moral education and begin to address areas of concern about its practical viability. And, as a matter of necessity, this involves a shift of focus towards the political. Chapter Five serves as an introduction to these issues by discussing the consequences of the way in which the interdependence of politics and moral education has been ill-appreciated by much recent popular and academic comment. This encompasses both those approaches considered previously and the arguments of many who think themselves to be offering an alternative akin to the model I have

advocated in the first part of the thesis. By means of a consideration of the Aristotelian distinction between virtues and skills, *arete and techne*, I draw attention to some ways in which the interdependence of politics, morality and education make our project greatly more difficult than many commentators have imagined. The chapter ends with a question: “Can we have a true education of the virtues (or an education of the true virtues) in the political context of contemporary pluralist societies?” The final two chapters assess divergent ways in which this question may be answered.

In Chapter Six I consider the work of Alasdair MacIntyre as an exemplar of a negative answer. As we will see, his contention is that any attachment to a recognisable Aristotelian understanding of the virtues and their development is irreconcilable with the theory and practice of liberal modernity. We may have one but not both, and must choose which we prefer. In this sense, MacIntyre’s claim is at one with the arguments of the majority of liberal thinkers during this era. But, of course, MacIntyre’s conclusion is different, for he considers the claims of virtue to be such that we must reject the superficial attractions of our liberal societies, and hope for a “new dark ages” in which virtue could again take life. I will argue that the choice posed by MacIntyre is needlessly stark, and that this starkness is built upon a contestable interpretation of Aristotelian thought which indicates his own attachment to the religious worldview of St Thomas Aquinas. An alternative interpretation of Aristotle’s ethics, drawing upon the work of Wiggins and McDowell amongst others, is shown to permit a greater degree of possible accommodation between virtue and pluralist liberal modernity.

Given these signs of hope, the concluding chapter looks to examples of contemporary liberal political thought to provide an account of how we may provide a ‘liberal home for virtue’. Contrasting the most recent work of John Rawls with that of Joseph Raz, I argue that the ‘liberal perfectionism’ of the latter suggests an attractive means of accommodation. It is acknowledged that this accommodation cannot hope to regenerate the virtues of Aristotle’s *polis*, or to leave us without difficult questions concerning our attachment to certain liberal

values. Nonetheless I hope that it has potential to provide us with a means of discharging our responsibilities for the moral education of the young without eliding either the plurality of society and its values, or the richness and complexity of moral character.

Chapter One

The Philosophy of Moral Education: Recent Orthodoxy

If one were to judge by the amount of material published concerning this topic it would seem that moral education has only become an issue of particular theoretical interest and controversy in recent years. Of course, major figures of the history of philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Locke and Rousseau had laid particular emphasis upon the centrality of a preferred variety of education to their ideas, but this approach became increasingly rare in the twentieth century. At the level of practice, it would similarly appear that moral education presented no particular problems. Crudely speaking, one might say that the moral role of the educator was considered to be one of replicating in the minds and actions of their pupils the morality of society, which in the traditional British context meant that children were largely taught to know their place and be pleased with it, whether this meant having a duty to rule or a duty to obey. Little concern was therefore shown to the nature of this morality (as opposed to the pedagogic means of its replication) and to what extent it was in the interests of all pupils to be in possession of it.

The social upheavals of the post-war years have exerted a powerful destabilising influence upon the traditional social order which had supported this degree of moral consensus. The declining influence of established Christianity, the rapid growth of mass public education, and the increasingly multi-ethnic nature of British culture and society have all served to erode the degree of confidence in there being a single shared moral code that could be uncontroversially promulgated in schools. This new found uncertainty concerning the ends and means of moral education became a matter of increasing concern for educationalists, and by the 1960s and 1970s had resulted in a great flurry of theoretical interest in the development of new forms more appropriate to the distinctive nature of contemporary

moral life. In this chapter I shall adumbrate some of the major attempts that have been made to construct such theories, and investigate the cogency of their (explicit and implicit) philosophical underpinnings. In doing so I shall point towards a series of challenges that have been raised against all of them - challenges which may indicate the potential for an alternative, and perhaps more satisfactory, account of the nature of moral education.

I will concern myself with three different theories of moral education, all of which have achieved popularity during this period amongst educationalists and have achieved a near orthodox status in teacher training institutions.¹ Firstly, I shall discuss what has become known as 'Values Clarificationism' ('VC') - a program developed from the mid-1960s by a variety of American educationalists (most especially Louis Rath and Sidney Simon) and furthered in the 1970s by Howard Kirschenbaum. Despite it being perhaps the most theoretically unsophisticated approach of the three, it has nevertheless exerted a considerable effect upon educational practice (especially in North America), and represents a general response to moral pluralism and uncertainty that is evident in many contemporary classrooms. Yet despite the degree to which its underlying assumptions are still evident in the views of many teachers, VC has largely fallen from favour amongst educationalists to be replaced by the concurrently formulated approach of Lawrence Kohlberg and his associates. As Barry Chazan felt justified in remarking in the mid-1980s, "the most prominent name in the contemporary renaissance of moral education is Lawrence Kohlberg...there are few discussions of moral education today at academic conferences or at informal gatherings in which [his] name does not appear."² His theory will therefore be my second area of concern. Finally, I shall discuss the ideas of the British philosopher of education John Wilson who, in association with the Farmington Trust, has developed proposals for moral education which rest explicitly upon work within analytical philosophy.³

Much of the academic debate about moral education in the past thirty years or so has proceeded on the assumption that these three approaches (and similar variants) are exhaustive of the possible responses to the nature of contemporary moral life. But although the work of Kohlberg, for example, has almost uniformly been presented in sharp contradistinction to the ideas underpinning VC, I would argue that in fact the similarities between these approaches far outweigh their differences. This is not, of course, to deny that there exist important areas where these approaches do not fully concur. There is certainly some disagreement over topics such as the relationship of rationality to feeling in the process of moral judgement or the question of whether there exists a 'logic' of such judgement which can be easily identified and taught. Yet despite these differences, the base meta-ethical presupposition that moral judgements are essentially 'non-cognitive' (incapable of having a truth value) and that values are therefore not anything real or objective is essentially shared.

In conceiving of values as though they were matters of personal subjective preference, the teaching of any particular moral code is rejected as inappropriate and indoctrinatory - a violation of the right of the individual to make up his or her own mind concerning such matters. We do not think people should be taught to enjoy coffee more than tea, or to prefer new Labour to old, so why should we accept teachers telling people that it would be wrong for them to have sex outside marriage? In trying to avoid claiming that there is any real distinction between these domains of free choice, both educational approaches have tried to define the role of the moral educator as one of developing capacities thought to assist the making of autonomous reasoned judgements, capacities which are shared across differing moral perspectives and which are neutral between them. It is not the moral *content* of any evaluative judgement that is the proper concern of the teacher (for what authority could he or she possess to know best what a child should value), but the *means* which have facilitated it.

I would like to investigate the possibility that the debate concerning moral education is needlessly and harmfully polarised between the ideas I have outlined here and those conservative critics who seek a resuscitation of an 'old order'. In doing so I hope to point to ways in which a return to traditional models of the inculcation of moral rules and codes ('ten commandments' style) is not the only alternative for those critical of the way in which the dominant modern approaches understand the nature of moral judgement and moral education. Before elaborating upon these claims, however, I should first discuss these theories in a little more depth.

Values Clarification

The various writings that are standardly taken together to comprise this approach developed from an intensely sceptical critique of allegedly indoctrinatory modes of moral education. VC rejects not only any claims on behalf of the moral authority and expertise of the teacher, but also the very idea that any one moral point of view can be said to be superior in any way to another - for morality is simply considered to be an "area that isn't a matter of proof or consensus".⁴ The end product of moral evaluation is of no concern (indeed the teacher is explicitly barred from attempting to affect this) as long as the process is deemed satisfactory. The development of the latter is thus the focus of the espoused pedagogical techniques of VC. These are open-ended in the extreme, involving children in situations (whether individually or in groups) which will "evoke a value-clarifying response and enable them to sort matters out for themselves".⁵ Whatever the exercise might be ('role-play' and self-analytical ranking exercises are particularly favoured), their intention is to aid the transition of a child's preferred moral judgements to the status of a fully-fledged 'value'. This process is judged according to success in meeting seven criteria - no belief being properly considered a 'value' unless it is:

1. chosen freely

2. chosen from among a number of alternatives
3. chosen after thoughtful consideration of the consequences
4. prized and cherished
5. publicly affirmed
6. acted upon in reality
7. acted upon repeatedly⁶

For the advocates of VC, the purpose of moral education is not the discovery or application of moral truth (for there cannot be any such truth in these matters), but the development of a child's valuing process to whatever end he or she prefers. For, as Schon defends this approach, "we cannot give children an absolute set of values, but we can give them something better ... a system that they can use to arrive at their own values".⁷ A Socratic mode of moral enquiry proceeding dialectically through rational challenge and response, for example, can only result in the unnecessary creation of intense classroom conflict over issues of controversy - a so-called 'pressure cooker' environment that cannot foster the well-being of children. All there is to hope for is that we can help children choose a value, any value, rather than see them fall into the nihilistic abyss. This account of modern moral life presents the educator with a very stark choice, but it is a choice that many teachers have been willing to make. Yet despite this, there are a number of ways in which the starkness of this choice may be due to the reliance of VC upon some rather questionable theoretical foundations. These are worthy of some consideration here.

Even if one were to accept the extremely sceptical response to modern moral diversity that VC avows, it is by no means clear that its preferred pedagogical strategies cohere very well with even this particular world-view. Given that no particular moral value or framework of values can be said to be superior to any other, the VC teacher is expected to be thoroughly neutral in their treatment of such issues - all values should be on an equal footing in the classroom. The teacher should see his or her role as being a kind of therapeutic technician,

facilitating psychological effectiveness in the valuing process. However, the aim of neutrality can result in different approaches depending upon how it is interpreted. It could mean that the teacher should refrain from referring to contestable issues of value completely, or ensure that if this proves impossible then no one value is given favour or priority over any other. Alternatively, the neutral teacher could be concerned that education should *produce* an environment in which different and competing values could be considered as equals, even if this is not the situation which originally pertains. Such a conception of neutrality would therefore license some considerable departures from the requirements of a solely procedural neutrality in order to correct the imbalances that may be imported to the classroom. Given that VC is opposed to the idea that morality could be seen as social conformity or conventional behaviour determined by influences outside of the individual and his or her personal valuing process, this second interpretation of the requirements of neutrality would be unavailable for its advocates or practitioners.

The results of this may be quite considerable. Children will inevitably bring with them to the classroom certain opinions from elsewhere. Parents may often attempt to guide their children toward some certain set of values. Popular media may reinforce these or offer another conflicting set. Even other school lessons may affect the standing of certain value options - science for example, would tend (perhaps inadvertently) to question the validity of world-views that did not fit its particular conception of rationality. This is what is often referred to as the 'hidden curriculum' operative within educational institutions. All of these external influences would serve to make the VC teacher's procedural neutrality become a means of reinforcing the heteronomy of the valuing process, rather than a facilitation of individual free choice. Also, according to John Stewart, this effect is merely furthered by the requirement that real values must be publicly affirmed. This creates strong peer pressure which serves only to undermine any truly personal preferences that an individual

may initially have. Thus, even though VC sets out as a critique of moral conventionalism it ends as an abdicatory means of cementing it.⁸

One might also express doubts concerning the extent to which a 'clarified' value is, or is likely to be, applied outside of the moral education classroom. It would not seem difficult to imagine that a child could prize and affirm the value of, say, tolerance or benevolence to an extent which successfully met the seven necessary criteria, but not exhibit these values at all when they are called for in ordinary life. Although criteria 6 and 7 are intended to cover this issue, we might still doubt whether VC could ever be truly effective in creating the sort of people who do good for its own sake rather than for some ulterior reward. Any approach to moral education short of brain-washing will of course face the problem that children may not always act in the way they should, but the very 'staged' conception of morality that is at work in VC would seem to heighten the chances of this becoming a major obstacle.

Morality becomes like Shakespearean English - an obscure, idiosyncratic language learnt for the purpose of dramatic performance with the vague hope that it may have civilising effects upon its students. We would surely hope for moral education to have a rather more direct impact upon character and behaviour (in all circumstances) than this. Taken together with the difficulties concerning neutrality, what we see here is that VC simultaneously exaggerates the insulation of the classroom from the effects of the outside world, and the likelihood that the values that arise from VC will be transferred to actual behaviour in that very same world. These are tendencies which evidently run in conflicting directions.

Critics of VC might also argue that there are some serious deficiencies with the subjectivist understanding of morality upon which it is reliant. However well values are clarified one might still question the extent to which these values accurately represent the subject matter of moral education at all. It is hard to understand how an approach that stresses the need for developing values from increased self-awareness, apart from social others, and would make no distinction between the values of Frederick West and Mahatma Gandhi⁹, can in any way

be dealing with something we would recognise as 'morality'. The self-evidence of certain evaluative distinctions is the bedrock upon which our sense of the importance of morality is built. If we could make no moral judgement in such extreme cases why would we think moral education is worth our while?

As well as not marking a clear difference between some moral judgements and others, VC is similarly unable to distinguish between the moral and the non-moral. The decision of whether or not to report a bully or racist teacher possesses just the same status as the choice of school dinner or training shoe style. They are both simply values, with no categorical difference between them. To stress the importance of one type of choice or the triviality of another is simply to engage in the type of indoctrinatory activity that VC disallows. The limitation of the role of the moral educator to this degree seems heavily counter-intuitive. As Robert Sandin remarks, "... an education that does not distinguish between such choices from a moral point of view only confuses the nature of moral decision" ¹⁰, and the promotion of confusion is surely not the aim of any form of education, even when it does concern issues of controversy.

It may be, however, that to continue to lambaste VC is somewhat akin to the savaging of a straw man, in that this approach has almost completely fallen from favour amongst educational theorists. Its rejection of moral indoctrination may have represented a form of recognition for the changing and diversified nature of our moral environment, but there is little doubt that the repercussions of this were greatly exaggerated. Its only response to the lack of moral consensus was to advocate complete subjectivism in education, and to reduce the status of all moral judgements to the level of personal preference.¹¹ For a form of moral education that is more responsive to the true nature of our moral lives one must look elsewhere.

Kohlberg's Cognitive Developmentalism

The central 'guiding thread' of Kohlberg's work across the various domains of philosophy, psychology, sociology and educational theory was his rejection of relativism (of the sort that underpinned VC) as a coherent foundation for a theory of moral development and education. The relativity of moral judgements cannot be inferred simply from the existence of cultural variance - it must also be supported by proper philosophical argumentation and it is this he finds lacking. Kohlberg proposed that we should be guided by a principle of 'methodological non-relativism' in ethics. Educators should consequently avoid both the indoctrination of dominant social values, *and* the idea that moral education can be simply guided by a child's own personal preference. Instead, they should grant primacy to universal or universalizable ethical principles in shaping the proper form of education.

Kohlberg's defence of this idea lay in his development of Piaget's earlier work on the psychological evolution of the various stages of moral reasoning. This had suggested that children's conceptions of the physical and social world necessarily progresses through an invariant sequence of thought levels. Using these ideas, Kohlberg (after studying the responses of children to a variety of hypothetical moral dilemmas) claimed to have identified six stages of moral development forming three levels or categories of moral reasoning. This model combined a psychological theory of development with a normative philosophical argument for the necessary superiority of certain moral outlooks over others. As he claimed himself; "the scientific theory as to why people factually do move upward from stage to stage, and why they factually do prefer a higher stage to a lower, is broadly the same as a moral theory as to why people should prefer a higher stage to a lower." ¹² The proper aim of the moral educator (in all cultures) is to effect the transition of children upward through the various rungs of this schema - any alternative aim serving only to obstruct and delay their proper moral development.¹³

The first (and lowest) of the three levels is characterised by a firm moral realism. Kohlberg termed this 'pre-conventional', and argued that the child at this level of reasoning will tend to conceive of moral values as possessing an objective, external status requiring mere compliance. Reasoning at this level moves through two distinct stages; firstly the 'punishment and obedience' orientation (the child merely aiming to avoid reprimand and punishment), and secondly the 'instrumental-relativist' orientation which sees the child seeking more to do what is socially acceptable in the hope of securing praise. At this base level therefore, the child's moral understanding and behaviour is notably egoistic.

The second, 'conventional' level of reasoning consists similarly of two stages. At the first of these, the so-called 'good-boy - nice-girl' orientation, the child's interest in gaining approval becomes less egoistic, and "the very idea of seeking to please assumes greater moral significance."¹⁴ From this stage, according to Kohlberg, the child should proceed to having a loyalty to general themes of 'authority' and 'law and order' as invested with this same moral significance. At this second stage, therefore, the child progresses to understand the socially cohesive and ordering functions of morality, but still retains a largely compliant attitude towards them.

It is only at the 'post-conventional, autonomous or principled' level, however, that genuinely moral forms of reasoning are apparently involved. At the first of its two stages, the 'contractual-legal' orientation, children grasp the idea that moral rules have the nature of man-made laws or conventions. This is characterised by moral reasoning of a social contract or rights based style. The sixth and highest stage of the developmental scheme is attained with the transition to 'universal ethical principle' orientations with allegiance being granted less to social rules or agreements, but to the moral principles that override them. Ideal moral reasoners are therefore fully autonomous rational actors of the kind we encounter in the political philosophy of John Rawls. Kohlberg cemented such a comparison by maintaining that the principle of justice is the key to satisfying the criterion of

universalizability (that valid moral principles are valid for all actors in all situations), and thus represents the pinnacle of ethical thought.¹⁵ The Kohlbergian morally educated person is thus, in Barry Chazan's words,

... a person who draws upon a combination of characteristics to confront a moral situation: reflection, principles, the value of justice a disposition to act, and the awareness of and interaction with a social setting. The morally educated person has learned how to reflect on a (moral) problem that arises in a social setting, consider the various alternatives, reach a resolution in terms of the most general principle of justice (rather than on the basis of custom, law, or whim) and translate this deliberation into a deed. The morally educated person for Kohlberg has learned the process of moral deliberation and judgement, and operationalizes the process so as to realise the principle of justice in the world.¹⁶

In facilitating the progression of their students to this ideal stage of moral development, the Kohlbergian teacher will make use of those very Socratic strategies that were derided by proponents of VC as leading to a counter-productive 'pressure-cooker' environment. Rather than encouraging the affirmation of currently held values, the teacher (assuming that the class is not wholly operating at stage six) should focus specifically upon areas of moral conflict. The use of hypothetical moral dilemmas is a particularly favoured means of doing this - Kohlberg's most famous example presenting the case of someone faced with the choice of whether or not to steal a prohibitively expensive drug from a local doctor to save his mortally ill wife. In the consideration of such conflictual situations, the teacher should encourage students to reflect upon the different possible ways in which the issue could be resolved ethically and the potential pitfalls of these. This serves to distance the student from mere received morality and to stress the importance of meta-ethical reflection. Utilising the Socratic means of critical questioning, the teacher should then seek to present the advantages of resolving such moral conflicts in a way belonging to a moral stage at least one stage higher than that at which the students had been operating. In the aforementioned dilemma, for example, the teacher should stress how the right to life will always 'trump' the right to property. This will ideally have the effect of promoting the moral development of at least some of the students towards a higher stage of reasoning.¹⁷

In many ways, the popularity that Kohlberg's ideas have enjoyed is not wholly surprising. He rejected the subjectivist and relativist underpinnings of VC that have appeared so fragile, and stressed the possibility of moral agreement and development. He boldly asserted the need for moral educators to involve themselves directly in the moral development of their students, and showed how such involvement can improve the standards of their moral reasoning. He also offered the vision of a just and egalitarian society as the ideal end-point towards which the efforts of teacher can lead us. There has, however, been a growth in the amount of criticism his ideas have received. I shall consider such criticism in two main categories, the first of which will address the charge that Kohlberg's developmental account of morality improperly prioritises one particular conception of the 'moral point of view' over others. The second category will concern the argument that he gives insufficient attention to affective and habitual aspects of moral judgement, action and learning (most especially characterised in the 'virtue ethics' tradition). I shall not, however, discuss the criticism levelled at Kohlberg by the work of Carol Gilligan under these categories. I shall later make more extensive reference to her ideas in terms of a possible critique of conventional forms of moral theorising (of which Kohlberg's is an example).

Kohlberg's attack on relativism rests upon a strong isomorphism between psychological and moral development. This in turn requires his notion of stage six to function as its *telos*, an end-point where all moral disagreements can be resolved and relativism is no longer an issue. One of the main criticisms of Kohlberg's work is that this ideal stage does not actually represent a final stage of actual psychological development, but is simply preferred *a priori*. It represents merely his attachment to Kant's ideas about the nature of morality conjoined with the theories of later neo-Kantians such as Hare, Rawls and Habermas.

Universalizability, prescriptivity and impartiality, it is argued, are not necessarily improper philosophical ideas upon which to *build* a theory of moral development and education, but

Kohlberg writes as though they arise out of his empirical work. Moreover, as a result Kohlberg ignores other possible foundations for such work. Utilitarianism, for example, is consigned to the status of stage four morality, with Kohlberg maintaining that its characteristic procedures of moral reasoning are encompassed and superseded by superior stages. This would seem to seriously underestimate the real issues of controversy between utilitarian and deontological ethics. Given the strong similarities between their ideas (which I shall detail later), one wonders quite what Kohlberg would have made of Hare's recent development of his position into a strong form of utilitarianism.¹⁸ Would this imply the retrogressive move which Kohlberg's 'lock-step' methodology refuses to allow? Indeed, his description of stage six morality forecloses upon many areas of debate in moral philosophy - are principles the centrepiece of moral knowledge? Does the principle of justice encompass all of morality? Does justice differ from impartiality? Can moral conflict be wholly eliminable? Does (as he supposes) correct moral reasoning necessitate correct moral action? How do we understand the *akratic* or morally weak? I will in due course give rather more sustained attention to some of these issues in a wider context.

Kohlberg seems merely to take for granted the assumption that the educator's proper concern is with the formal processes of moral reasoning. It is the form rather than the content of the morality that is the subject of development. Although the final stage of development is meant to produce a specific moral content -that of the ideal principle of justice - the worth of other stages is assessed only in terms of their form. This would imply that a Nazi reasoning at stage three (social conventionalism) is comparable to someone who reasons in a way conventional to a more civilised society. Laurence Thomas argues that it would be strongly counter-intuitive to claim that these two stage three moral reasoners were making equally good progress towards the just moral content of stage six - "... if the virtue of kindness is an instance of moral betterment, one certainly does not contribute to this end by teaching people how to treat others ruthlessly and sadistically." ¹⁹ He concludes that the

notion of moral development can make little sense without a more substantive content about right and wrong behaviour than Kohlberg allows for, and that this entails an emphasis upon the partly habitual and affective character of morality. Furthermore, his intellectualist conception of moral development and education does not, as John Kleinig has remarked, “explain why we should care to engage in what they call genuine moral reasoning, nor why, when we have engaged in it, we should care enough to act on it.”²⁰ Morality is surely not just another school subject like mathematics, or even moral philosophy, but is more intimately connected with our relationships with other people, and those aspects of character exhibited in these relationships. It is more than just a matter of knowing the rules.

This stress upon the importance of moral character is not meant to imply that abstract moral principles and procedures of moral reasoning have no place in our moral experience - they clearly do - but rather claims that Kohlberg improperly conceives of them as being exhaustive of morality and thus of moral education. Critics such as Don Locke and RS Peters have argued that we should not be expected to engage in full moral reasoning each time we perform a moral action as such a requirement distorts the ways in which we characteristically act according to reasoned habits. We may unthinkingly and habitually wait to hold open a door if an infirm person is following us into a building, but this does not mean that this habit is unresponsive to reasons - merely that we do not needlessly engage in the same act of reasoning every time we perform the action. As Locke maintains;

... habits need not be blind habits, and to the extent that the agent would notice relevant changes in the circumstances, and modify or interrupt his habit accordingly, his habit is sensitive to moral reasons. And this is entirely compatible with his taking no account whatsoever of those circumstances, provided they do remain as usual.²¹

Kohlberg, however, associated notions of habit and character with the cultural transmission model of moral education which, along with relativism, he had sought to reject. He intentionally opposed his idealisation of an ethics of principle and duty to those approaches he saw as promoting, to use his own term, a mere ‘bag of virtues’ - a selection of desired

character traits. He argued that the huge number and variance of such possible traits (from Aristotle's magnificence and temperance to the 'monkish virtues' of humility and chastity) made them wholly relative to cultural circumstance, and that even if we could agree on a certain set, the 1930s studies of Hartshorne and May had suggested that children do not tend to display the consistent aspects of character appropriate to virtue²². His wholesale rejection of the virtue ethics tradition along with the very idea of a moral training or apprenticeship left Kohlberg with a strongly unbalanced, over-intellectualised account of moral judgement and action. He sought to transport both teacher and student from the relativity of their ordinary moral experience to a domain of autonomous abstract reasoning but left no point of contact other than faith in psychological development to carry us there. We have strong reasons to doubt whether we could arrive there by such means or that it would even prove to be such a wonderful destination.

Wilson's 'Moral Components'

Other writers who have criticised Kohlberg's developmental methodology have not seen reason to lose faith in the delights of its destination. John Wilson has expressed strongly sceptical doubts about the notion that the understanding of moral concepts and procedures is tied to chronological stages of psychological development. He argues that even the very youngest child can comprehend these concepts in some useful form and that "if there are 'stages' through which children must pass before being able to learn [what counts in moral reasoning], either they occur very early or I am not clear what they are."²³ Despite these disagreements, however, Wilson's conception of the task of moral education has strong affinities with that of Kohlberg.

Throughout his lengthy career, Wilson has shown little patience with those who see morality as being in some way 'too hot to handle' educationally. This reluctance (or 'resistance' as he peculiarly likes to term it) stems from what he sees as an inability to

conceive of morality as being a curriculum subject like any other, possessing its own particular rational procedures. The moral educator, Wilson believes, should be concerned to establish “what equipment the morally educated person logically requires and, from that, how to assess such equipment and how to generate practical methods to enhance it.”²⁴ He maintains that such a focus upon these second order features of moral reasoning thus avoids both a relativism which rejects any notion of ‘right answers’ in morality as well as an association with any particular moral content. The facilitation of these logical procedures of moral thinking will therefore allow the morally educated person to choose their own moral views and commitments in a rational way.

As for Kohlberg, the ideal form of moral reasoning is *principled*. The solutions of moral quandaries are available *via* the rational formulation of moral principles that are overriding, prescriptive and universalizable. *Overriding* in that they exhaust the realm of legitimate action guiding considerations (trumping all others such as emulation, authority, faith or preference). *Prescriptive* in that they recommend a certain course of action (as opposed to being descriptive and merely presenting details of a factual situation). And lastly, *universalizable* in that choosing a principle to govern our own behaviour commits us to accepting that all other peoples behaviour should also be legitimately governed by it (thus causing us to see that our own interests count for no more and no less than the interests of anybody else). To live one’s life according to such principles of one’s own rational construction is to be autonomous. Once this form of moral reasoning is recognised, educators may seek to facilitate its development by paying attention to those kinds of knowledge, dispositions and skills which enable it to be utilised in practical situations.

Wilson identifies four broad categories of these ‘moral components’. PHIL involves having the concept of a person, using it in the formulation of principles as described above and having feelings which support such principles. EMP is the ability to conceptualise and identify emotions both in others and in oneself. GIG is knowledge of the facts of a given

moral situation and the skills of communicating both verbally and non-verbally in such situations. Lastly, KRAT involves utilising these different forms of appreciation in the forming of considered rational principles, and having the ability and commitment to act on these in practice. He provides an example of a possible topic concerning 'old people'. This would attempt to convey 'hard' facts about these people and the conditions under which they live (GIG); an understanding of how they feel (EMP) and why they are just as important as anybody else (PHIL); and an ability to make moral decisions and take action in such a context (KRAT).²⁵ As long as both practitioners and theorists are clear about the kind of thinking that moral educators should be concerned with developing and the components which enable it to so develop, the practical means which facilitate it are judged largely according to their empirical success (a concept with which Wilson has little difficulty). This may involve direct teaching of the philosophical procedures of moral thinking, or (perhaps for younger children), the use of role-play and moral dilemmas to promote understanding. As for Kohlberg, Wilson has more recently stressed the importance of creating a communal atmosphere that best contributes to the success of moral education by avoiding obvious counter examples in whole-school practice, and allowing the opportunity for children to put their newly learnt procedures of moral reasoning into practice in a collective setting.²⁶ Yet this does not indicate any real change in Wilson's understanding of the nature of moral reasoning - these more recent thoughts concern the best ways in which we may *support* moral education the *locus* of which still lies with the autonomous reasoner.

Evidently, the similarity of his vision of moral education to that provided by Kohlberg will mean that many of the criticisms that were directed towards him hit equally hard against Wilson. Their shared conception of morality as a matter of principled action where any particular moral choice can be subsumed under a particular governing principle is, as I have argued above, somewhat contentious. It lacks an acknowledgement of an affective

dimension of moral judgement in which emotional response is not something to be simply *governed* by reason, but rather is an important part of what it is to be moral in that given instance. This concentration upon the formal procedures of moral reasoning considers, at most, only part of the picture about morality. Even if Wilson and Kohlberg were to have been right about what these procedures are (and I doubt that they were), they ignore too much of importance to provide sound theories of moral education. We are left in some doubt concerning the motivations of children to behave according to the moral principles which their lessons will encourage them to form. They may have the ability to construct these principles, but the knowledge of where and when moral action is called for (thus when to call upon one's principles), the perception of the salient facts in the situation which calls for such action, and the integrity and courage to act in the way we know to be right are equally important. It is these further aspects of moral decision and behaviour that I believe calls for an understanding of the issues raised by the idea of *character* and its development. I shall in due course return to the implications of these issues.

Although he has been criticised for his concentration on the purely formal 'second-order logic' of moral language, Wilson has also faced the charge that he has smuggled into this category first-order normative ethics. Whilst Kohlberg stressed how moral development would lead to an end-state of a distinctly Kantian (and Rawlsian) morality, Wilson would seem to have imported some of the central ideas of utilitarianism into his supposedly content-neutral analysis of 'moral components'. This is evident in his identification of PHIL - "the degree to which one can identify with the people in the sense of being such that other people's feelings and interests actually count or weigh with one".²⁷ We may appreciate that an awareness of other people and a concern for them is an important part of morality, but when conjoined with the requirements to form overriding, prescriptive and universalizable principles and to possess feeling to support these it becomes its sole concern. We might well ask why values such as truthfulness, loyalty or Kohlberg's justice cannot be similarly

overriding. In the guise of a formal analysis of morality, Wilson has thus prescribed a monistic morality based upon a supposedly universal sentiment of benevolence - namely utilitarianism.²⁸

Wilson is consequently open to attack not only from those who oppose his stated intention to provide proposals for moral education based upon a formal account of the logic of moral language, but also from the opponents of the normative morality we find embedded within his account. Utilitarianism has of course been attacked in many different ways. Its monistic interpretation of the morally good life as the promotion of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (or other less hedonistic forms of utility), and the apparently counter-intuitive nature of its answers to certain moral dilemmas have proved to be particularly contentious. But for our purposes it would seem that its greatest downfall is the extent to which it appears to misrepresent some of the essential features of our ordinary moral experience. Bernard Williams has famously focused upon this 'self-denying' aspect of utilitarianism in asserting that it would force us to neglect the importance of our close personal relationships of care and responsibility in order to retain the sanctity of the impartial utility promoter's viewpoint as the exemplar of moral agency. Thus if one were presented with a dilemma such that one could save from certain death either (but not both) a great philanthropist or one's wife, one should reason on the basis of which action was going to have the best impartial results in terms of the maximisation of utility. One would therefore have a moral duty to save the philanthropist. Williams argues that this would be to ask 'one question too many' - that the truly moral person would not even think before rushing to save their wife - and that to think this improper is to neglect the importance of our personal relationships to the foundation of morality. The same kind of argument has also been presented by Joseph Raz who claims that certain values by their very nature preclude instrumental reasoning. To weigh up the value of friendship against, say, economic utility is not to adopt the moral role of the impartial spectator, but is simply to misunderstand the nature of friendship. To submit all

our personal values, projects and relationships to such calculation would be, as Stephen Lukes puts it, “itself an expression of the weakening or absence of those very relationships or else a degraded simulacrum of them”.²⁹ Only those people who would not even think to engage in this sort of reasoning are truly capable of possessing friends. The general claim here is that utilitarianism misses something essential and irreducible about the moral experience (the *phenomenology* of morality) and that it would be improper for us to advocate any programme of moral education based upon such foundations.

The specific issue of utilitarianism is particular to the criticism of Wilson’s approach.³⁰ The general aim of this section has not been to focus upon every negative aspect of the three theories discussed, but to point towards ways in which they may be linked in terms of their philosophical outlook despite the efforts of the theorists involved to disassociate their ideas from each other. At the beginning of this chapter I claimed that the degree of commonality between the most popular contemporary approaches to moral education had long been underestimated. I hope that the foregoing discussion has provided some initial justification for that claim. Despite the degree to which Kohlberg and Wilson are critical of the vulgar relativism they see to underlie Values Clarification, and endeavour to present their own theories in sharp contradistinction to it, they evidently share some notable common features. Predominant amongst these is an emphasis upon the priority of the general *form* of moral concepts over their particular moral *contents*, and upon the *intellectual* nature of such concepts at the expense of their situation within the broader context of the entire *character* of the virtuous moral agent. In the next chapter I shall develop this argument with a consideration of some theoretical approaches which differ with regard to such issues, and which may provide some firmer ground for the development of an approach to moral education which avoids many of the failings I have discussed up to this point. Before this, however, I shall investigate some of the ways in which contemporary philosophy has helped

to engender this particularly one-sided understanding of the purpose of an education in morality.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The contemporary philosopher whose work is most closely linked to these theories of moral education is undoubtedly R M Hare. John Wilson appeals directly to Hare's work on many occasions, and Hare himself has written of his approval for Kohlberg's work as largely supportive of his own. His understanding of the nature of moral language, largely defining the 'school' known as 'prescriptivism', is set firmly within the heritage of post-Kantian analytical philosophy. Although having long since passed out of fashion in the ivory towers of pure philosophy (its heyday having been in the 1960s), the traces of something very much akin to prescriptivist views are discernible in virtually all of those programmes for moral education that have self-consciously sought to reject traditional inculcatory models. Indeed, David Carr has recently remarked that

... its [prescriptivism's] influence is still strong in educational philosophy which like some other areas of 'applied' philosophy has tended to lag somewhat behind the mainstream of academic philosophical work and, beyond educational philosophical circles as such, various rather confused versions of the prescriptivist viewpoint are readily enough encountered from time to time in 'official' educational policy documents from state departments of education.³¹

The genesis of prescriptivism is perhaps best understood in terms of its response to the popular account of moral meaning offered in a variety of ways by philosophers such as AJ Ayer and Charles Stevenson in the 1930s and 40s. This 'emotivist' theory was constructed upon two philosophical pillars - a logical positivist conception of meaning and a Humeanism concerning the relationship between reason and desire. The first stressed that only those statements that were empirically verifiable by reference to sensory experience or were analytic explications of grammatical structures could be said to possess any real meaning or truth value. The second, Humean aspect of the emotivist theory lay in its assumption that

reason alone cannot motivate action as this is the function of passion or emotion (the so-called 'belief-desire thesis').³²

Taken together, these assumptions led to the view that moral (or other evaluative) judgements could not report anything about the world other than the emotive state of those who issue them. The *meaning* of these judgements was not to be understood in terms of their reports, but in terms of the emotive function which the judgements themselves serve. According to this line of thought we would not be using terms such as 'good', 'bad', 'righteous' or 'evil' to express any kind of truth claim at all, but would instead be expressing our emotional feelings towards some object or course of action. These terms are therefore reduced to the same status as utterances like 'boo' and 'hiss'. Although some have attempted to broaden the scope of emotivism to include more general forms of 'pro-attitude' as well as base emotion, the core features of the doctrine remained more or less the same. This *non-cognitivist* denial that moral claims could be true or false in the way that empirical statements can thus preserves our understanding of morality as essentially action-guiding - allowing us to see something strange in the behaviour of someone who pronounced a certain practice to be evil yet continued to engage in it.

This account of the nature of moral language - one which evidently has great affinities with many of the presuppositions of Values-Clarification - seems instantly to be rather counter-intuitive. When we make a moral judgement we certainly feel as though we are doing rather more than expressing our emotional response to its object. Indeed we are likely to see such a suggestion as something of an affront. If the use of terms such as 'good' and 'evil' served only to express approval or disapproval, why would we need phrases other than 'I approve' or 'I disapprove'? In using this former kind of moral language we surely think ourselves to be doing more than merely expressing a preference, but to be appealing to some moral court of appeal that exists outside of our own subjectivity. It not simply that we experience a 'gut feeling' that there exists a real difference between mere expression of taste or

preference and a *bona fide* moral judgement. The distinction would seem to rest upon rather firmer ground than this (as it would need to). For instance, someone who said that they enjoyed the flavour, texture and effects of olives but did not like to eat them would be asked a number of clarifying questions in order to set the matter of their tastes aright. There would initially appear to be something distinctly odd about their position. It is doubtful however that we would have so much difficulty in accepting someone's opinion that although martyrdom was a very fine and admirable thing, they did not actually wish to become a martyr.

Our acceptance that this disjuncture between judgement and action may be a sign of something other than irrationality in the latter instance reflects our understanding that it is a fundamentally more difficult arena of choice. One would hardly imagine that the failure to eat olives could be the result of a weakness of the agent's will rather than their logic, although this might be our first choice of explanation to explain the avoidance of death on behalf of someone who believed that their cause merited the loss of their own life.³³ Also, and somewhat conversely, although the non-eater of olives might well provoke more demand for reasons to explain the puzzling disjuncture between their beliefs and actions, the latter judgement (that martyrdom is a good practice) would ordinarily require more extensive and objective reasons to command *agreement* from others. We may be happy that someone's preference for olives is explained merely by the fact that they 'like them', but we would not agree with support for martyrdom on the same basis - the first is intrinsically a more subjective matter. It is distinctions of this kind between different types of judgement that emotivism, in reducing all judgements to the expression of preference cannot account for. And this is a failure which contributes to rendering it unsatisfactory as an account of the meaning of moral language.

The account of morality that largely superseded that of emotivism was provided by RM Hare. He retained the Humean *non-cognitivist* assertion that moral language does not

describe any features of the natural (or non-natural) world together with the *internalist* claim that to accept a certain moral view is to be motivated by it. Yet, despite this, he rejected the view that morality represented nothing more than a set of emotive responses or attitudes. The *prescriptivist* theory that he offered in its stead is evident in the critiques of Values Clarificationism offered by the proponents of Kohlberg's moral developmentalism in that he insists that moral judgement, whilst certainly non-cognitive and non-descriptive, is nonetheless a rational activity. The focus now moves to the identification, analysis, and in an educational context the development, of these logical forms of moral reasoning. Indeed, Hare himself has maintained that "... if parents first, and then children, understand better the *formal* character of morality, and of the moral concepts, there would be little need to bother, ultimately, about the content of our children's moral principles, for if the form is really and clearly understood, the content will look after itself."³⁴

Once more to situate moral philosophy in the context of wider theories of meaning, the origins of prescriptivism are perhaps best understood against the background of the criticisms of logical positivism made in the later work of the Cambridge philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. He famously maintained that philosophy is misled if it accepts the assumption (shared by the logical positivists) that the purpose of language is solely to describe the world. The meaning of language cannot therefore be understood merely by reference to its grammatical structure, but must be considered in the context of those concrete situations (or more widely, 'forms of life') in which it is necessarily implicated. Any theoretical study of language which neglects reference to the context of its use is therefore no longer considering real language at all, but rather 'language on holiday'.

The influence of these criticisms was particularly strong at Oxford University where, against the background of the ensuing 'ordinary language' school (as represented by Austin, Ryle, Strawson and others) Hare developed his theory.³⁵ He shared with the emotivists the view that moral terms such as 'right', 'good' and 'ought' are not descriptive but rejected the

idea that they were irrational emotional responses. Instead, he argued that judgements employing such terms were predominantly used to guide action and were thus *prescriptive* - entailing moral imperatives that told people what to do. Such prescriptions, being rational judgements, had to be supported by reasons (although these were logically distinct from factual discourse). Following Kant, Hare saw the logic inherent in the proper use of the moral 'ought' as insisting that our judgements commit us to universalizable principles - prescriptions that could apply equally to all those acting in similar circumstances. We do not have our moral prescriptions overruled by someone who merely describes new facts to us, as no evaluative conclusions necessarily follow from descriptive conclusions (this is the 'fact/value' distinction at the heart of non-cognitivism). Although we may change our evaluations once we learn of new facts (such as learning that someone we thought of as honest had told a lie), there is no reason why people may not agree on all the facts of the case yet differ greatly in their evaluations. What we are subject to however is the logic inherent in moral prescription, in that we could not accept that two people were alike in all the morally relevant features yet evaluate them differently. For example, we could not consistently claim that although A and B performed similarly kind acts, only A could be considered to be a kind person because B had large feet. This kind of moral inconsistency would violate the requirements of universalizability. As would someone who thought it right to exploit his workforce, but would not be prepared to be exploited himself, even though there was no relevant difference between himself and his employees. Although they do not appeal to any form of moral reality for ultimate justification, a person's moral attitudes must be internally consistent.³⁶

However, whereas "Kant appears to have thought that by the right exercise of human reason in moral matters we could discern or establish a moral with a genuine claim to absolute or universal authority over any rational being irrespective of his local or personal circumstances"³⁷, prescriptivists allowed the social and linguistic relativity of the content of

moral judgements. Indeed, this was often seen to be one of the main advantages of the theory. Although the objectivity of the universalisation criterion was unquestioned, they maintained that such universalisations would not necessarily produce the same results for all people. Hare argued in an oft-cited passage that,

... if asked to justify as completely as possible any decision, we have to bring in both effects - to give content to the decision - and principles, and the effects in general of observing those principles, and so on, until we have satisfied our inquirer. Thus a complete justification of a decision would consist of a complete account of its effects, together with a complete account of the principles which it observed, and the effects of observing those principles... Thus, if pressed to justify a decision completely, we have to give a complete specification of the way of life of which it is a part... If the inquirer still goes on asking 'But why *should* I live like that?' then there is no further answer to give him... We can only ask him to make up his own mind which way he ought to live; for in the end everything rests upon such a decision of principle. He has to decide whether to accept that way of life or not; if he accepts it then we can proceed to justify the decisions that are based upon it; if he does not accept it, then let him accept some other, and try to live by it.³⁸

A certain amount of rational variety of morality, particularly across cultures, was therefore to be expected. This allowed the theory to cope with some of the challenges posed by the degree to which value pluralism seems to have become an endemic part of the modern world. But in accepting that moral justification was in the final instance a matter of personal preference, Hare exposed himself to the criticism that all manner of amoralists or fanatics could adopt a set of internally consistent prescriptions that the rest of us would find distinctly unpalatable. Were the only grounds upon which we could criticise a Nazi those of consistency, or were their particular kinds of prescription wrong in some more fundamental sense? In response, Hare claimed that fanatical and socially-pathological prescriptions would simply never prove attractive when considered in the light of the requirements of universalizability - despite holding that Jews should be exterminated, the Nazi would be unlikely to hold that he should be available to be killed on the grounds of some similar morally irrelevant characteristic. In other words, any fanatic who thought rationally enough about their position would most probably come to revise it. Many critics have expressed

doubts concerning the likelihood that the exposed inconsistency of certain moral ideas is sufficient to remove the possibility that people would find them attractive - that the strange sounding 'principled Nazi' is perhaps not such a remote idea.³⁹

Just as emotivism seemed to underlie the theory and practice of Values Clarificationism, we can now see the extent to which prescriptivism serves much the same function for the ideas of Kohlberg and Wilson. In conceiving of morality as essentially non-cognitive but subject to distinct criteria of rational usage, their primary emphasis was placed on the construction and observance of principles under which individual moral quandaries may be subsumed. The ideal moral actors being equal and autonomous choosers of their own ends, reasoning in an impartial manner, and with such ratiocination being sufficient for the production of consistent moral prescriptions. There is, however, an extent to which both writers diverge from the letter of Hare's work. The isomorphism between psychological and moral development, leading to an embracing of the 'justice perspective', that is proposed by Kohlberg would certainly seem to move beyond the reluctance shown by Hare in his early work to claim any universal justification for a particular normative ethic (or that any such ethic could be so justified). As he was engaged in a purely second-order investigation of the logic of moral statements, to extract first-order conclusions from this investigation would be to transgress the fact/value gap (to the existence of which he is committed). Although his analysis is at the very least suggestive of certain kinds of substantive morality, this reluctance also distinguishes his early work from Wilson's monistic confidence in the primacy of benevolence and thus, when universalized, of a form of utilitarianism.

Matters have altered more recently. In his 1981 work *Moral Thinking*⁴⁰ Hare not only distinguished for the first time between two distinct 'levels' of moral thought, but maintained that at the higher level universal prescriptivism will lead us inevitably towards certain evaluative conclusions. Splitting moral thought in this way seemingly allows Hare to avoid the criticism that his theory misrepresents the ordinary usage of moral language in

insisting that we engage in the construction of universal prescriptive principles every time we indulge in evaluation. This is a demand which would appear to make morality so all-pervasive that it left little time for us to pursue our ordinary personal projects without its interference. He countered this suggestion by arguing that ordinary lower-level moral thinking (that of the 'prole') differs from the upper-level's (that of the 'Archangel') in being characterised by an intuitive appreciation of, and obedience to, the general moral principles that have shaped our upbringing. These have been internalised and their importance is heavily felt. Recourse to the higher level, however, enables us to subject these received opinions to revisionary criticism. When the principles we ordinarily obey come into conflict, or uncertainty grows concerning their application, we adopt the role of the Archangel as far as we can - to become creatures that are wholly impartial and in possession of a full command of logic and the facts of the situation. We now assess the merit of such principles by imagining ourselves to be in the position of all those agents who would be affected, and taking their preferences equally into account. The thought of the Archangel is no longer thought to produce answers that are subject to a certain degree of ineliminable moral relativity, but instead accords with a utilitarian normative ethic. For Hare therefore, universal prescriptivism now generates the justification for a particular set of moral answers.⁴¹

This would seem would seem to be rather more in accord with Wilson's understanding of the implications of prescriptivism for moral education, than with that of Kohlberg who consigns utilitarian thinking to an inferior stage of development. If we recall, Wilson's model of moral education advocated the development of those 'components' that facilitated the formulation of prescriptive, overriding and universalizable principles. Among these components was that of PHIL which we have identified as "the degree to which one can identify with the people in the sense of being such that other people's feelings and interests actually count or weigh with one".⁴² Hare would now seem committed to postulating along

with Wilson the existence of some shared motive or sentiment of benevolence. Without this, there would seem to be little reason to be sure that people would indeed want to assume the role of the Archangel, or that if they did assume it, that they would reach mutually beneficial (as opposed to mutually harmful) conclusions. There is, however, no mention in Wilson's work of any more than one level of thinking. He argues that we are fairly certain what the logical requirements of using moral language are, and that we may properly educate children of all ages in them;

... it is fairly clear from the results of research that some, at least, of the types of reasoning required are well within the grasp of quite young children. If we consider the moral components one by one, we shall not think it too rash to say, on general or *a priori* grounds, that the vast majority of children, even within the primary school age range, will be capable of understanding each individually, and of understanding how they all relate to one's eventual moral behaviour.⁴³

Only such an education in the logic of morality has, for Wilson, the right to be termed a moral *education* at all, since it is the only methodology that aims to increase the rational autonomy of the pupil. Any approach that sought to develop moral dispositions or habits in children⁴⁴, or to inculcate obedience to supposed moral authorities, is thus debarred on educational grounds. This would appear to make an education in Hare's higher level of 'critical thinking' the only legitimate option. We must seek to produce Archangels and not proles. Yet this would seem to rob Hare's two-level approach of much of its force. He does not want to argue that the lower-level of thinking somehow inheres in people naturally. It is a means of understanding and thought that is just as much in need of being acquired through education as the upper level. He therefore concedes that the best way to bring children up to be moral may well be to inculcate them with moral feelings.⁴⁵

Of course, a satisfactory moral education will naturally also involve an introduction to the thought of the higher level, but Hare does not discuss whether this would be concurrent with lower level education, and if not, when and for whom it would be appropriate. Although our lower level moral intuitions are subject to criticism and revision in terms of

principles of the upper level (which has priority), Hare hopes that they avoid some of the excessive demands of utilitarian calculation that I have previously discussed, by allowing us to pursue a plurality of moral goods and avoid the ‘overload’ of benevolent duty overwhelming our personal projects until our moral practice comes in need of specification or resolution of conflict. Strange as it may seem, Hare allows that we may actually justify this release from the demands of the utilitarian life on indirectly utilitarian grounds. But whatever the stability of Hare’s claims here, Wilson’s reliance upon a single definition of morality ignores any of their possible advantages in ‘finessing’ some of the standard criticisms of utilitarianism.

This is not the place to discuss in any more depth the details of Hare’s reformulated theory. Whatever the relation of moral education theorists to the more precise arguments of this particular moral philosopher, it is clear that Wilson and Kohlberg belong squarely in the intellectual tradition of which Hare is the most well-known recent member. Through their work (and that of other related writers), it has dominated the domain of moral education in the last 30 or so years. This heritage, which owes its principal philosophical debts to the work of Hume and Kant, shares certain central features which I have outlined previously. In the next chapter, I shall move on to discuss those various sources of criticism of this way of thinking that might potentially offer resources of use in rethinking moral phenomenology and moral education in a more satisfactory manner.

¹ This is not to claim, of course, that such approaches are actually being utilised to their full extent in all schools. It is clear that the desires of educational theorists (supporting whichever approach) count for little when compared with the demands of an increasingly troubled economy that has less need for autonomous moral reasoners than for compliant workers (or indeed compliant non-workers).

² Chazan, B *Contemporary Approaches to Moral Education* (1985, New York, Teacher’s College Press) p. 68.

³ Other approaches to moral education developed in the UK include the ‘Lifelines’ materials of Peter McPhail *et al* e.g. *Moral Education in the Secondary School* (1972, London, Longman), and the neutralist methodology for the treatment of controversial issues espoused by Lawrence Stenhouse and the School’s Council Humanities Project e.g. The Schools Council/Nuffield Foundation *The Humanities Project: An Introduction* (1972, London, Heinemann).

⁴ Raths, L, Harmin, M and Simon, S *Values and Teaching* (1966, Columbus Ohio, Charles E. Merrill).p. ix.

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- 5 Simpson, E *Good Lives and Moral Education* (1989, New York, Peter Lang) p. 105.
- 6 Scharf, P (ed.) *Readings in Moral Education* (1978, Minneapolis, Winston Press) p. 25.
- 7 Simon, S and Olds, S *Helping Your Child Learn Right from Wrong: A Guide to Values Clarification* (1976, New York, Simon and Schuster) p. 17.
- 8 Stewart, J 'Problems and Contradictions of Values Clarification' in *Phi Delta Kappan* LVI 10 1975.
- 9 "It is not impossible to conceive of someone going through the seven value criteria and deciding that he values intolerance or thievery. What is to be done? Our position is that we respect his right to decide upon that value." Rathes, L, Harmin, M and Simon, S *op. cit.* p. 227.
- 10 Sandin, R *The Rehabilitation of Virtue: Foundations of Moral Education* (1992, New York, Praeger) p. 59.
- 11 In his attempts to develop the VC approach, Howard Kirschenbaum has been willing to accept that there are actually some values that it prizes over others. Critical thinking, autonomy, justice and equality are amongst these. He refuses to claim, however, that such values can have any rational foundation, and that they may actually be more important than a preference for the flavour of vanilla over strawberry. See his *Advanced Values Clarification* (1977, La Jolla CA, University Associates).
- 12 Kohlberg, L *Essays on Moral Development*; vol. 1 *The Philosophy of Moral Development : Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (1981, New York, Harper and Row) p. 131.
- 13 It is not claimed that all children will necessarily reach the highest level of moral reasoning, merely that development will progress sequentially through the levels to its eventual end-point whether this is the ideal of level six or not.
- 14 Carr, D *Educating the Virtues* (1990, London, Routledge) p. 161.
- 15 Kohlberg's more recent work has exhibited strong similarities to Jurgen Habermas's ideas about discourse ethics and communicative action. Habermas has also used Kohlberg's empirical work as a foundation for his theorising.
- 16 Chazan, B *op. cit.* p. 83.
- 17 In his more recent work, Kohlberg has developed his interactionist methodology beyond techniques of one on one (or one to class) Socratic questioning to encompass more holistic themes. He has stressed the importance of the school representing what he calls a 'just community' to best facilitate moral development. Nonetheless, his characterisation of this development remains the same.
- 18 Hare, RM *Moral Thinking* (1981, Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- 19 Thomas, L 'Morality and Psychological Development' in Singer, P (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (1991, Oxford, Blackwell) p. 472.
- 20 Kleinig, J *Philosophical Issues in Education* (1982, Melbourne, Croom Helm) p. 252.
- 21 Locke, D 'Moral Reasons and Moral Action' in Locke, D and Weinrich-Haste, H (eds.) *Morality in the Making: Thought, Action and the Social Context* (1983, Chichester, John Wiley and Sons) p. 123.
- 22 Although it is not clear why we should expect children to have fully settled moral disposition when their moral training is incomplete.
- 23 Sandin, R *op. cit.* p. 83.
- 24 Wilson, J 'First Steps in Moral Education' in *Journal of Moral Education* vol. 25 no. 1 1996.
- 25 Wilson, J *A New Introduction to Moral Education* (1990, London, Cassell) p. 172.
- 26 *Ibid. passim.* Cf. Wilson, J 'First Steps in Moral Education' *op. cit.* p. 88.
- 27 Wilson, J Williams, N and Sugarman, B *Introduction to Moral Education* (1968, London, Penguin) p. 192.
- 28 It is ironic that one of Wilson's main criticisms of Kohlberg has been that his prioritisation of 'justice' ignores the variety of moral concerns that we have in actuality, and thus illegitimately delimits moral education to the mere clarification of that concept. This variety of concerns will always for Wilson be reducible to the terms of utility. Cf. Wilson, J 'Philosophical Difficulties and Moral Development' in Munsey, B (ed.) *Moral Development, Moral Education and Kohlberg: Basic Issues in Philosophy, Psychology, Religion and Education* (1980, Birmingham AL, Religious Education Press).
- 29 Lukes, S 'Making Sense of Moral Conflict' in Rosenblum, N (ed.) *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (1989, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press) p. 139.

³⁰ However, the line of criticism that concerns the supposedly self-denying aspects of utilitarianism is also often offered against deontological forms of moral theory (i.e. those that concentrate, on the 'right' rather than the maximisation of the 'good'). Michael Stocker, for example, claims that the demands of impartial reason identified by both brands of theory are not full enough for anyone to actually live a full human life according to them. In neglecting (and indeed precluding) the domain of personal caring relationships they induce a kind of 'schizophrenia' by aiding the progressive divergence of accepted moral reasons and our ordinary moral motivations. The effects of this are claimed to be profoundly dispiriting. I will subsequently return to this variety of argument concerning the shape of modern ethical theory *in toto*. See Stocker, M 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' in *Journal of Philosophy* no. 73 1976.

³¹ Carr, D *Educating the Virtues* *op. cit.* p. 96.

³² "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" Hume, D A *Treatise of Human Nature* II. 111. 3 . Contemporary Hume scholars often play down such aspects of his so-called 'official theory' in favour of themes less amenable to many contemporary non-cognitivists. e.g. "... in his later works Hume is content to call the complex of capabilities exercised in moral judgement ... 'simply a more enlarged and more cultivated reason'" Baier, A 'Moral Sentiments and The Difference They Make' in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1995 p. 26. See also her *A Progress of Sentiments* (1991, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press).

³³ Michael Stocker has notably argued that this disjuncture (or 'schizophrenia' as he terms it) is particularly prevalent in contemporary moral life and philosophy. Cf. his 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' *op. cit.*

³⁴ Hare R.M. 'Language and Moral Education' in Cochrane, D, Hamm, C and Kazepides, A (eds.) *The Domain of Moral Education* (1979, Toronto, OISE Press) p. 104.

³⁵ Other writers who have sought to bring the insights of the later Wittgenstein to bear on the subject matter of ethics have rejected Hare's rationalism for a focus on the social conventional status of rules within particular 'forms of life'. Those philosophers chiefly associated with philosophy in Wales, such as RW Beardsmore, Howard Mounce, DZ Phillips, and Peter Winch are central here.

³⁶ Some critics have pressed the claim that universalizability requirements force the moral agent to overlook the particular requirements of individual cases, especially of a tragic nature. Peter Winch, for example, argues that Captain Vere in Melville's *Billy Budd* makes a moral choice in condemning Billy to death, but not one that he would have wished to have been universalized. Hare responds, however, by distinguishing between 'generality' and 'universality' of principles, the latter admitting of especially detailed characterisations which need not extend to a wide variety of cases. Although they may not include proper names or definite descriptions, they may apply to only one person as long as that person may be specified in 'universal qualitative' terms (e.g. 'mother of...') In fact, these very specific universal prescriptions are taken by Hare to be exemplary. Cf. Winch, P *Ethics and Action* (1972, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) pp. 196-214, Hare, RM *Freedom and Reason* (1963, Oxford, OUP) pp. 38-9.

³⁷ Carr, D *Educating the Virtues* *op. cit.* p. 95.

³⁸ Hare, RM *The Language of Morals* (1952, Oxford, OUP) p. 69.

³⁹ MacIntyre, A *A Short History of Ethics* (1968, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 262.

⁴⁰ Hare, RM *op.cit.*

⁴¹ In his earlier work, Hare had claimed that the requirements of prescriptivity and universality produce a 'formal foundation' for utilitarianism, but did not go so far as to argue that they led to it. Cf. *Freedom and Reason* *op. cit.* p. 123.

⁴² Wilson, J Williams N and Sugarman, B *Introduction to Moral Education* (1968, London, Penguin) p. 192.

⁴³ Wilson, J *A New Introduction to Moral Education* (1990, London, Cassell) p. 193.

⁴⁴ Wilson's distinction between habit and reason in morality seems to me heavily overdrawn. He ignores the extent to which habits need not be 'blind' - they may be greatly responsive to reasons without having to admit of the full process of his preferred model of moral reasoning in every instance. To those who reject this preferred model, the role of habit in morality becomes even more central. I will return to a consideration of this issue in the next chapter.

⁴⁵ Hare, RM *Moral Thinking* *op. cit.* pp. 197-8.



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Chapter Two

Sources of Philosophical Challenge

The last chapter provided a critical survey of some of the major theories of moral education in the second half of the twentieth century and discussed the ways in which these were theoretically indebted to particular and controversial views in moral philosophy. In attempting to discover some more adequate form of moral pedagogy, it is therefore reasonable for us to start at the level of ‘underpinnings’ and look towards those varieties of moral philosophy which are opposed to the paradigms we encountered in the previous discussion. I will, in this chapter, consider three broad stands of thought which have, in recent decades, held out the promise of providing a different and more satisfactory understanding of the nature of ethical thought and action, and the forms of education which may promise to be in service of this.

The first of these is the ‘analytical’¹ criticism of neo-Kantian moral philosophy offered both by the so-called ‘naturalist’ (or ‘neo-naturalist’) philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Geoffrey Warnock and Peter Geach, and in more recent ‘moral realist’ or ‘cognitivist’ work of John McDowell, David Wiggins and (to an extent) Jonathan Dancy. I shall then focus upon the ideas of Bernard Williams, Charles Taylor and (especially) Alasdair MacIntyre, all of whom have offered various forms of an ‘historicist’ critique which has sought to explain the predominance of a certain way of conceiving of morality in terms of a historical account of its genesis. Lastly, I will discuss the ideas of those further writers, most notably Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, who have sought to conjoin a critical analysis of the failings of contemporary moral philosophy with a psychological theory of gender difference. Without making any particular claim about the connectivity of these various ideas (they in many ways oppose each other as we shall see), I hope that they will point us toward new ways of

thinking about moral education which may avoid the flaws of those which we have discussed so far. One such avenue I shall pursue here will be concerned with the proper place of principles in our ethical thinking.

The Analytical Challenge

We have seen that one of the more counter-intuitive aspects of Hare's theory concerns his restriction of our possible lines of response to 'the fanatic' (this being the moral agent who is willing to abide by the universalized logic of his own antisocial prescriptions). His commitment to the fact-value distinction (which cements the view that the facts about a situation cannot entail certain moral conclusions) means that such people can be condemned upon procedural grounds only. Although no moral judgement may be dismissed *tout court*, Hare feels that it would be an empirical improbability that someone would continue to hold fanatical or antisocial views if they had truly reasoned in accordance with the logic of moral language. To many, this might seem an unsatisfactory response. When faced with barbaric opinions we surely find them to be something more than poorly reasoned - we find them to be *abhorrent*. Hare's view that any ideas may form legitimate moral prescriptions as long as they satisfy certain formal and procedural conditions has had many dissenters. Indeed, the debate within English moral philosophy in the 1950s and 60s represented something of a contest between Hare, and his opponents who argued that by its very nature morality cannot be just anything. Rather, its content was held to be necessarily restricted.

These 'naturalist'² (or as Hare termed them, 'descriptivist') moral philosophers held that prescriptivism's definition of goodness in terms of commendation could not avoid a certain logical circularity. If something being 'good' can only be described in terms of our commendation of it, how is this commendation to be understood other than in terms of something being good? They argued that moral notions were rendered meaningless if they were unrestricted in terms of content - more specifically, if they did not possess some

definite relation to the wants, needs or function of man *qua* man (as opposed to those attributes we may merely wish to possess). The way in which the naturalists detailed this restriction of content were various. Philippa Foot claimed that morality (to her mind, the ‘virtues’) must be intimately connected with the satisfaction of human *wants*. These are not simply reducible to the status of preferences (as Hare would hold), but are things such as the freedom from boredom, loneliness and injury that, for Foot, are unquestionably ultimate (not dependent upon human decision). To give a moral agent a reason for action he or she must be shown that such action will lead to the satisfaction of wants of this kind.

Foot wished initially to argue that all virtues could be shown to be beneficial traits for each individual agent, and thus provide them with a reason to act in accordance with them.³ Wisdom and temperance are directly beneficial, whilst justice, for instance, is indirectly beneficial in that anybody who acts in a continuously unjust manner will be so castigated by their community that they will suffer from loneliness. Subsequently however, she has disposed of her underlying assumption that moral judgements necessarily give reasons for action to each and every moral agent (further distancing her from prescriptivism by rejecting its ‘internalism’ about the motivational force of reasons for action), and has argued that virtues such as justice and charity directly satisfy the wants of others but not necessarily those of oneself.⁴ Although this means that we may not be able to supply reasons to convert the immoral or amoral to the way of virtue, and that it is probable that some people will indeed not find it attractive, Foot maintained that there are those who care enough about the wants of others to be charitable and just. And just because we may not necessarily be rationally able to persuade others to join us, there is no reason to think that we may not rightly morally castigate these people as selfish and quite possibly evil. Her conclusion was that we should “... be less troubled than we are by the fear of defection from the moral cause; perhaps we should even have less reason to fear it if people thought of themselves as

volunteers banded together to fight for liberty and justice and against inhumanity and oppression.”⁵

Foot has also challenged Hare’s belief that we cannot derive evaluative conclusions from factual premises. She has claimed that the description of certain actions in certain situations makes moral conclusions unavoidable. If, for instance, someone witnesses children in danger of being hit by a car and immediately rushed to save them without concern for the danger he or she faces, this is certainly an exhibition of ‘courage’. How better might we describe it? Peter Geach has extended this line of argument into a particular view on the necessary subject matter of morality.⁶ He argued that the word ‘good’ is properly understood in what he termed an ‘attributive’ rather than a ‘predicative’ sense. If this is so we could not properly understand what it is for something to be ‘good’ until we can properly specify the function of the object so called. Just as a clock may properly be seen as a good clock if it is neither slow nor fast but tells the time accurately, we can only understand the meaning of, say, a good teacher, if he/or she satisfies well the requirements of this social *role* by (amongst many things) successfully developing children’s knowledge and understanding of their subject matter, providing a proper exemplar of mature and morally worthwhile behaviour, and encouraging children to think for themselves. The criteria for goodness are in both cases not merely a matter of personal choice - they are limited by the facts of the matter.

Geach argued further that it is not simply by virtue of their social and institutional *roles* that men can be conceived of as possessing a certain function, but fundamentally in terms of their status as human beings. In other words, the question of what makes for a good man can be answered by presenting the facts of man’s proper function. Geach’s religiously inspired attempt to revive the Aristotelian notion of a distinct human function or *telos* has of course met with much opposition. There would seem to be much more understandable disagreement about the true function of people *per se* than there is about that of a clock or

even a teacher (where there is certainly enough). Nevertheless, his work (together with that of his wife, Elizabeth Anscombe) stressed the continuing importance of a certain way of viewing ethics that had, until fairly recently, been long overlooked in modern moral philosophy. Indeed, strong traces of their work can be discerned in the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre which I shall discuss in due course.

The work of these 'naturalist' moral philosophers presented the main contemporaneous challenge to the ideas of Hare and others working in a similar theoretical *oeuvre*. More recent years, however, have seen a revival of forms of moral realism which, despite continuing remarks about the predominance of the post-Kantian orthodoxies (such as Hare's), seem well set to relegate such theories to an inferior position. Moral realists have gone further than simply to cast doubt upon the fact/value (or the associated belief/desire) distinction's centrality to all ethical questions and have sought to defend the idea that the world possesses moral properties about which moral judgements may be true or false. This claim thus rejects the central thesis of non-cognitivism - that moral claims, whether they be expressions of emotive response or prescriptions for desired action, are distinctively different from beliefs about descriptions of the world. For the non-cognitivist, we may all agree upon a certain description but differ about how we evaluate it. The moral realist takes this to be strongly contrary to the intuitions we have about our use of moral language. If we were to witness the aforementioned instance of someone saving endangered children from a car, would we really feel that our terming the act 'courageous' is not a cognitive belief capable of being true or false? Do we not really *observe* the courage? Our ordinary thought and speech seem for the moral realist to contain the idea that moral judgements are not commending morally neutral descriptions, but are instead somehow *responding* to the existence of some kind of moral reality present in the situation. They have, in their various ways, attempted to work out the consequences of this intuition and to defend it against sceptical attack.

These recent developments in moral realism (or ‘moral cognitivism’ as it often known) have proceeded along two main paths. Although united in their rejection of the common non-cognitivist complaint (famously articulated by J.L. Mackie⁷) that realism involves the positing of ‘queer’ moral entities existing in the natural world, their rebuttals take different forms. That found largely in an American context, and represented by the work of philosophers such as David Brink, Richard Boyd and Peter Railton⁸, has sought to downplay the discontinuity between moral properties and scientific enquiry and claim that their ideas can be justified by such methodology. Alternatively, the British moral realists (most especially John McDowell, David Wiggins, and Jonathan Dancy⁹) have rejected the idea that moral realism is questionable from the standpoint of scientific enquiry as indicative of a “philistine scientism”.¹⁰ They maintain that moral properties cease to look quite so queer if we are freed from the narrow strictures of such thought. It is the ideas of this latter group that I shall consider here.

Although the moral naturalists to whom we have previously referred defended the idea that moral judgements may indeed be entailed by certain factual descriptions, they characteristically felt that the kind of motivation necessary for an agent to act was not similarly entailed. Unlike Hare, they did not see moral language as inherently prescriptive and action-guiding. Their moral *externalism* stressed that one could rightfully hold certain moral beliefs to be true irrespective of whether or not one was so motivated as to perform acts in accordance with them. A moral belief will always require the addition of a supportive desire to be sufficient to motivate. The more recent British non-naturalist realists reject this kind of view. They argue that to conceive of beliefs and desires as so sharply split is to fail to free oneself fully from the kind of metaphysics that made the fact/value distinction so theoretically attractive. The faculty psychology of the eighteenth century (the implications of which are most strongly evident in Hume) has so separated the domains of affection and cognition, *pathos* and *logos*, that we are left with an understanding of the

world as, in McDowell's words, "motivationally inert". Against this, the realists maintain that we must see how to truly understand something as moral is to 'feel its pull', and that this 'pull' can be exerted by the cognitive features of a situation. Moral motivation can thus be understood best as a *response* to moral reality rather than as the expression of some desire or pro-attitude. This represents an endorsement of moral *internalism*.

Some critics of course question the very idea that such moral properties can actually exist in the world so that people may be responsive or unresponsive to them. Where exactly might these properties reside? As I said earlier, the British realists rebut these charges by claiming that they exhibit an unjustified attachment to a world-view in which natural properties are all that may be said to exist. They stress that just because the moral properties they posit are not natural ones there is no reason to find such a suggestion troubling. These properties are not 'queer', but distinct. McDowell points towards an analogy with secondary properties such as colour as being helpful in this respect.¹¹ Redness, for instance, does not exist amongst the 'furniture' of the world in quite the same way that a rock or a refrigerator does, for it would not be 'there' for someone who did not share our sensory capacity to see it. Properties such as colours do not therefore exist independently of human sensitivity to them - they are necessarily perspectival. This does not however, give us cause for concern over whether or not colours are real and we do not accept the idea that the colour of an object is merely a matter of personal preference. A (first class) cricket ball simply is red, irrespective of how many people may mistakenly find it otherwise. People may be colour-blind, wearing tinted spectacles, or viewing the ball under sodium lighting, but this does not affect the simple truth of the matter. Something can thus be objective for McDowell not only if it exists independently of all human experience, but also if "it is there to be experienced, as opposed to being a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to experience it."¹²

Just as the cognition of a cricket ball's redness requires a certain kind of visual sensitivity, moral properties require people to possess a necessary sensitivity for them to exercise their 'pull'. This sensitivity or capacity of moral perception allows people to discern the salient moral features in any particular complex situation, and react in an appropriate way to them. Morality is not simply a matter, as in the post-Kantian tradition, of choosing amongst possible courses of action, but is also to do with seeing the world in the right way. A virtue is thus, in McDowell's words, a "reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behaviour".¹³ A kind person with an acquaintance in hospital would not, on this account, attempt to subsume the question of whether or not to visit them under the dictates of a universalizable principle (such as 'always seek to please the infirm') so as to act out of a rational duty to it. They would instead discern the need of the sick acquaintance as the salient moral consideration in that particular situation and act in response to it. The cognition of the moral reality (the need) is sufficient to motivate the kind act for the truly virtuous person.¹⁴

Of course, the identification of a kind person as someone who simply 'sees' the moral requirement and acts in accordance with its demands might appear to be somewhat 'cold'. Where in this picture is the caring desire to help that we associate with kindness? The realists respond that such an understanding is once again the result of a mistaken attachment to the idea that beliefs and desires are wholly separate domains. They maintain that seeing the salient moral features of a situation is often exactly what it is to feel or care. Moral sensitivity is certainly cognitive in that one may be correct or mistaken in discerning the moral reality, but it also has an intrinsic and necessary connection to one's affective sensibilities. "There are truths which cannot be known without the aid of an affective sensibility - patterns of desire and sentiment can be epistemic preconditions to seeing the world as it is."¹⁵ David McNaughton offers a musical analogy:

If the beauty of Mozart's music is a genuine feature of the music, to which one can be sensitive, does this not commit the realist ... to the view that any creature, even one without our tastes, might come to be aware of it? For, if some property is genuinely in the world, then it ought to be accessible, at least in principle, to all observers. Yet, if the outsider did not share our tastes, he would not find it beautiful, which contradicts our original supposition. The realist response to this objection is to claim that *only someone who shares our human tastes and sensibilities* can be aware of things in the way that we are. Far from thinking of moral cognition as an essentially passionless matter it is quite compatible with his position to claim that there may be some evaluative features that can only be seen by someone who cares very deeply.¹⁶

The British moral realists do not see the notion that moral properties may be dependent upon the existence of particular human sensibilities for their reason giving and motivational force as in any way threatening their reality.¹⁷ Neither do they wish to present any absolutist Platonic argument to the effect that our sensibilities are static and mechanistic capacities to react in certain ways to unchanging moral 'forms'. Instead, they (most especially Wiggins) maintain that the nature of morality is in an important sense 'response-dependent', in that moral properties cannot be understood in isolation from the ways in which those with the appropriate sentimental capacities¹⁸ conceptualise the practice of responsiveness to such properties. To continue the musical analogy, as the appreciation of a musical form develops so does the richness and complexity of the ways in which we respond to it. Increased sensitivity to the music might result, for instance, in narrower and more various specifications of response, while the evolution of our concepts of responsiveness can aid our sensitivity to real features of the music itself. The development of this evaluative practice allows our richer and more complex forms of appreciation to be seen with some justification as judgements made appropriate (or mistaken) by real musical properties. Ultimately, in Margaret Little's words, "if the 'property-response' pair takes hold, we reach a point where the appropriateness of finding that something has the property and the appropriateness of having the relevant response are each held answerable to the other."¹⁹ Importantly, the resources for the evolution of the groupings and classifications that are involved in this development of our evaluative practice are held within the practice

itself - "we are not simply to fire off *at random* in our responses to things."²⁰ Moral concepts cannot ensure their own correctness - "... they are responses that are correct when and only when they are occasioned by what has the corresponding property A and are occasioned by it because it is A."²¹ The point is that their development is in no way predictable or limited in the extent to which it may evolve from its base in the sentiments. On such an account moral concepts are local, anthropocentric and, in a very mild way, subjectivist (in that they are referential to the responses of subjects).²² There is no guarantee that such concepts can ever be immune from continual criticism and change, even if this means that a consensus in a true moral judgement might actually be overthrown in favour of an untrue one. Although we might on occasion have good reason to believe that we hold a certain moral belief, and that consensus upon it is justified, because it is actually true (in the same way, according to Wiggins, that we believe that $7 + 5 = 12$ because there is *nothing else for us to think*), this may not be conclusively provable. Despite this, Wiggins assures us that

... our practice can operate without any special or philosophical guarantee that truth and correctness *will* stay around in this way. Our practice can even continue to operate in full awareness of the flimsiness and contingency of the natural facts that it reposes upon, in the awareness that so often impinges upon valuation as we know it of our proneness to error and self-deception, even in awareness of the theoretical possibility that our minds and nervous systems may have been poisoned or perverted. What we can do about that danger is only to take ordinary precautions, and to have ordinary regard ... for the credentials with which and conditions from out of which people's judgements are made. Better, we can take ordinary precautions, and then, in deference to the inherent difficulty of the subject matter, a few more.²³

In its criticism of the non-cognitive position (as exemplified by both emotivism and prescriptivism), this form of moral realism provides resources for modes of moral education which may potentially avoid the pitfalls of the currently favoured alternatives. In this discussion however, I have concentrated upon its meta-ethical aspects at the expense of a more detailed consideration of the implications of this type of theory for our understanding

of moral phenomenology and moral development - two concerns which I have identified as being at the heart of any attempt to elucidate alternative possibilities for moral education. Later on, I shall explore these in more depth - focusing first of all upon the ways in which we might come to see the idea of morality being 'principled' action as in many senses inadequate, and then upon a more precise specification of what might be meant by the moral 'perception' or 'sensitivity' to which I have made passing mention, and the role the emotions may be thought to play in this. Before this, however, I should continue with the concerns of the current chapter.

The Historicist Critique

Other theorists have joined in this assault upon the perceived deficiencies of much modern moral philosophy, but have approached their target in a slightly different manner. Bernard Williams for example, has notably criticized the over-concentration on notions of *obligation* that pervades both the Kantian and utilitarian traditions, together with their desire for theoretical abstraction and 'purity'. This allies him with the arguments of Susan Hurley concerning the ethically distorting effects of an attachment to what she terms 'centralism'²⁴ (the idea that 'thin' ethical concepts such as 'right' are necessarily prior to localized 'thick' concepts such as 'treacherous', 'honest' and 'courageous'). Where they differ, however, is that Williams firmly rejects her belief that such problematic assumptions can be dismissed by mere analytic *fiat*. In criticising both Hurley and John McDowell, he maintains that;

I do not think, as they do, that the degree of autonomy enjoyed by non-specific terms such as 'right' is simply something to be determined by philosophical enquiry; the extent to which a society uses such terms as opposed to thick concepts is partly a historical question, and has important social implications. In this I agree with Alasdair MacIntyre.²⁵

This reluctance to ignore the necessarily historical aspects of the study of morality has led me to classify Williams alongside both Charles Taylor and MacIntyre as a *historicist* critic. Despite differences in philosophical and political outlook, these three writers have

commonly looked upon the failings of modern moral philosophy as requiring some kind of historical narrative for their proper diagnosis.²⁶ This narrative will enable us to understand the variances of moral and philosophical understanding over time, as well as the ways in which certain such modes of understanding may be adjudged superior to certain others, whilst avoiding any notion of a universal standpoint that stands over and above any particular concrete allegiances.²⁷

A key theme in Williams' work is to distinguish ethics from what he calls the 'morality system'²⁸. Central to this peculiarly modern 'institution' is the notion that unites otherwise differing utilitarian and Kantian approaches within it - that obligatory action exhausts all of the ground of morality. This he finds a particularly constricting notion, as well as one that importantly misunderstands the nature of our moral lives. Construing all ethical thought in terms of obligations is to extend both not far enough and too far. Not only does it make little sense of the ethical value we ordinarily find in supererogatory acts (those that go beyond the demands of duty) and in those admirable people who perform them, but also proves excessively demanding by refusing to see that obligations are merely "one kind of ethical consideration amongst others"²⁹ We should therefore reject the maxim that only another obligation can match the force of an obligation in an instance of deliberation, and present a more complex and contoured picture of the ethical life. Necessary to this picture will be a notion of *importance*, whether to an individual or 'simply, important'.³⁰ Against such a background we may better understand the proper place of obligations, and those times when they are perhaps not to be the sole or overriding consideration.

A similar idea is also central to the work of Charles Taylor who has long criticised much of modern moral philosophy for its attempt to offer an "ethics without the good."³¹ This contravenes his understanding of human agency only making sense against the background of what he calls 'strong evaluation' - the way in which we distinguish "between things which are recognised as of categoric or unconditioned or higher importance or worth, and

things which lack this or of lesser value.”³² Without an understanding of this, morality is constrained in all of the ways Williams describes, as well as in leaving no place for notions of either a ‘good life’ (what it is good to be as opposed to what it is good to do) or the ‘Good’ as an object of love. Only by resurrecting these notions (which still evidently exist in ordinary thought) can moral philosophy cease being so constrictive and prove of assistance in orienting ourselves in moral space.

Whereas Williams blames a general modern desire for theoretical purity, exemplified most obviously by Kant, for the ways in which our thought about morality has gone astray from the realities of ordinary ethical life, Taylor has attempted to trace in rather more detail the various intellectual and moral sources he holds to account for this decline.³³ Foremost amongst these is what he terms the ‘naturalist’ temper of modern thought. This is not the same usage of the word as that with which I categorised the ethical naturalists such as Foot and Geach, but refers to the belief that human beings can be understood in the same way as the rest of the natural world, and are thus best studied in ways continuous with the methods of natural science.³⁴ One of the main consequences of this form of naturalism is a suspicion of those things which cannot be fitted into a scientific view of the world. Varieties of ‘importance’ or ‘the good’ that are not wholly reducible to the strength of our desires or preferences fit especially well into this category and can thus find no place in any naturalist or scientifically inspired moral philosophy. It attempts to rid itself of any notion of the good and find moral conclusions from a position disengaged from concrete local realities. The Kantian stress upon obedience to a rational moral law is illustrative of this approach, as are Hare’s attempts to see the procedural operation of moral language as the sole area of concern.

Our modern thinking has, for Taylor, moral as well as epistemological sources. One such is what he calls the ‘affirmation of ordinary life’, which has attempted to reject the idea that there are certain ‘higher’ goals or ways of life that are substantially different from the

normal course of people's lives in order to liberate them from inordinate demands. Another is the modern idea of freedom, which conceives of the free agent as wholly controlling his or her own actions, liberated from all outward influence (such as that of any 'good' thought to be in some sense 'higher' and constitutive of the agent's identity). As well as in Kant, this idea is evident in all those theories that judge the worth of some act of deliberation procedurally, in terms of how the agent thinks, rather than in terms of its substantive outcome, thus giving primacy to the creations of the agent's own will rather than to the identification of some actual good in the world. Because such ideas cohere so well with our culture's Judeo-Christian heritage, we have begun to think of them not as certain moral ideals amongst others, but as essential features of what it is to reason morally.³⁵ These various tempers of modern thought, whether epistemological, moral, or whatever, have combined for Taylor to shape moral philosophy into the kind of unsatisfactory practice that it has so often been in contemporary times, and there are few instances where this unhelpfulness has been quite so apparent as in the field of moral education. Before we go on to consider the extent and manner in which these failings may perhaps be remedied, or rendered less debilitating, we should consider what has possibly been the most systematic attempt to account for the failings of post-Enlightenment moral philosophy (and indeed the entire social order within which it exists) in terms of a distinct historical narrative or 'genealogy'. This is contained in the recent work of Alasdair MacIntyre.

MacIntyre's criticisms of post-Kantian moral philosophy are developed within a distinctively socio-historical methodology (for "we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be").³⁶ He argues that the theoretical partner of liberal modernity, sharing and developing its various malaises, is emotivism. Even those theories (such as prescriptivism) that have arisen in criticism of it are merely further, and often more intense, symptoms of our 'emotivist age'.

The terminus of justification is thus always ... a not further to be justified choice, a choice unguided by criteria. Each individual implicitly or explicitly has to adopt his or her own first principles on the basis of such a choice. The utterance of any universal principle is in the end an expression of the preferences of an individual will and for that will its principles have and can have only such authority as it chooses to confer upon them by adopting them. Thus emotivism has not been left very far behind at all.³⁷

The common problem of all moral philosophy in the Kantian tradition, and therefore for those theories of moral education which we have considered thus far, is a failure to explain why we would prefer one moral principle to another (or prefer having them to not), other than in terms of their logical form. This would seem to run the risk of dissolving into a type of almost aimless voluntarism. For MacIntyre, the effects of the dominance of such theories are clear to see in the parlous and disordered state of contemporary moral language - its most striking feature being that "so much of it is used to express disagreements".³⁸

This, he maintains, is not just an expression of the failure of individual discourse, but exposes something much more fundamental about these disagreements - their interminable and incommensurable nature, whereby there is no "rational way of securing moral agreement".³⁹ Our continued desire to appeal to impersonal rational arguments or criteria (such as universal standards of justice or liberty) when we engage in moral debate is paradoxical when combined with the arbitrary and often incommensurable nature of the premises upon which we base such discourse. This conflict between the meaning and use of moral language represents, for MacIntyre, the predicament of modernity. Modern debate utilises assorted fragments of earlier forms (e.g. moral law from Aquinas, positive liberty from Green and Rousseau, universalisability from Kant etc.) but has stripped them of the contexts which provided them with their proper meaning.

Unlike the arguments of the neo-naturalists therefore, MacIntyre claims that in a very important sense the emotivist understanding of morality is in a way actually *true*. This is because it accurately describes its modern condition - for we are truly 'emotivist selves'.

His socio-historical method allows him, however, to grant this much but still to deny that the emotivist account can (as its proponents claim) hold true universally, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Because of its inherent logical circularity (as discussed in the previous chapter) it does not offer a cogent account of the *meaning* of moral utterances, but instead accurately describes the *use* to which they are put in contemporary debate.

This discrepancy between the meaning and use of moral terms, and its concomitant sociology of manipulative and Weberian social relations (represented most powerfully by the defining ‘characters’ of our emotivist culture - the aesthete, the therapist and the manager) was not, however, always so. The plausibility of emotivism has stemmed from its power in condemning the failures of the ill-fated Enlightenment project to provide rational foundations for the moral standards it had inherited. The embarkation of our culture upon such a doomed intellectual enterprise was, for MacIntyre, the root cause of contemporary emotivist *anomie*. Our moral decline is traced through three stages. The first refers to a (pre-Enlightenment) time when moral language embodied genuine and objective moral standards. This stage then gave way to a variety of unsuccessful attempts to maintain these standards and provide them with rational justification, before we eventually arrived at the third and last stage - our present culture. By means of a discussion of various Enlightenment figures, notably Kierkegaard, Kant, Diderot and Hume, he maintains that despite their differences their condemnation to failure arose from those beliefs which they held in common. All of these philosophers were attempting to rationally justify traditional moral codes without realising that such codes were necessarily tied to the “historical and cultural contexts within which their function was very different from that imagined by those who had inherited the rules but lived in a very different environment”.⁴⁰ The eventual failure of this over-ambitious project has had immense consequences that have not, as yet, been fully appreciated. For

... henceforward the morality of our predecessor culture - and subsequently our own - lacked any public, shared rationale or justification. In a secular world religion could no longer provide such a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and action, and the failure of philosophy to provide what religion could no longer furnish was an important cause of philosophy losing its central cultural role and becoming a marginal academic subject.⁴¹

Needless to say, any forms of moral education that continued to treat their subject matter as akin to an academic subject, solely reliant upon the proper exercise of principled reason would be, according to this line of thought, deeply misguided. They would not only prove ineffective, but would also continue to reproduce the deficiencies of our emotivist age, incapable of offering any hope of alternative futures. In order to avoid the consequences of the empty promises of the Enlightenment (and its nihilistic mirror image of Nietzschean genealogy), MacIntyre argues that we must ascertain what exactly has been lost from our predecessor culture when moral language still possessed a consistent and objective meaning.

Taking a lead from the work of Elizabeth Anscombe⁴², MacIntyre stresses that the failure of the Enlightenment thinkers to provide a rational justification for morality stemmed from their common misunderstanding of the nature of the moral rules they were seeking to ground. These were treated as though they could be abstracted from the particular social context in which they were embedded and considered in the form of pure reason. The extent to which they were unable to do this successfully is only now becoming wholly clear, when morality stands more and more in need of justification but we seem to lack any resources with which to complete this task. The origin of these moral rules, for MacIntyre, lay within the context of the trichotomous moral framework which had characterised the mediaeval period (influenced most strongly by Aristotelian philosophy). This framework consisted of; firstly, untutored human nature as it happened to be; secondly, human nature as it could be if it realised its *telos*; and thirdly, the precepts of rational ethics as the means of transition from one to the other (the system of the 'virtues'). The rejection of the notion of a distinct human *telos* by the Enlightenment philosophers left them with only the first

element of the framework with which to derive the third - a demand that eventually proved impossible to satisfy.

... for they did indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other... They inherited incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action and, since they did not recognise their own historical and cultural situation, they could not recognise the impossible and quixotic nature of their self-appointed task.⁴³

Williams and Taylor concur with MacIntyre in diagnosing not merely the deficiencies internal to these dominant theoretical strands of modern culture, but also the parlous position of any practice that does not recognise the sources of its historical genesis. This is particularly problematic for those modern currents of thought that seek to deny the existence of anything intrinsically higher, important or 'Good', even those values which supply them with their own *raison d'être*. Or, as Taylor puts it,

...they are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, like freedom, altruism, universalism. These are among the central moral aspirations of modern culture.... And yet these ideals drive the theorists towards a denial of all such goods. They are caught in a strange pragmatic contradiction, whereby the very goods which move them push them to deny or de-nature all such goods. They are constitutionally incapable of coming clean about the deeper sources of their own thinking. Their thought is inescapably cramped.⁴⁴

For him the remedy is clear. We must acknowledge the moral sources that have shaped the way we are, not just those dominant ones which we have discussed, but also what he feels is the rival and corrective paradigm of our culture – revolving around the ideals of 'romantic expressivism' (such as imagination, creativity, and authenticity) which have been inherited from a number of different strands of our cultural narrative. Once these sources are properly 'articulated' as ideas of the Good, rather than as competing preferences, Taylor holds out the hope that they will eventually prove to be mutually supportive and realizable. The values central to modern philosophy and liberal politics, such as freedom, equality and autonomy, are not necessarily problematic in themselves, but require the

proper kind of historically informed understanding and defence to be true to our moral identities. The means of our regeneration are thus latent within modern liberal society, merely requiring a little expert 'articulation' to make their salvatory force felt.

Williams does not, however, share Taylor's optimism, and is especially suspicious of this idea that the Good as an object of allegiance needs any sort of resuscitation - especially if in any sort of religious or spiritual form (as Taylor maintains it does).⁴⁵ Rather than seeking to acknowledge or articulate the specifically Judeo-Christian elements of our moral sources, Williams in fact approves of the "departure of Christianity" that he observes in modern culture. We are all, for him, in some sense the children of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, unable anymore to believe in those practices that cannot withstand unmasking by the critical reflectiveness that is such a central part of who we all are. Rather than seeking to regret or celebrate the way in which "reflection destroys knowledge"⁴⁶, he dismisses any sort of grand hope for renewal (whether philosophical or cultural), and merely hopes that the departure of a mistaken vision of the purpose of moral philosophy will perhaps enable us to understand why we may have wanted it in the first place, and what we may prefer instead.

How truthfulness to an existing self or society is to be combined with reflection, self-understanding and criticism is a question that philosophy, itself, cannot answer. It is the kind of question that has to be answered through reflective living. The answer has to be discovered or established, as the result of a process, personal and social, which essentially cannot formulate the answer in advance, except in an unspecific way. Philosophy can play a part in the process, as it plays a part in identifying the question, but it cannot be a substitute for it.⁴⁷

MacIntyre's stress upon the idea that theory cannot be viewed in isolation from the society in which it is embedded, has led him to be far more dismissive of the capacities for improvement in modern society. The moral certainties of the past have been rendered obsolete by the individualism of the post-Enlightenment age, and it is only by rejecting modernity *in toto* that we could ever hope to revive them and the coherent moral order which might ensue. As for how this might be possible for those of us 'infected' by the

moral characteristics of the modern world, we are left unsure. Perhaps there really is no way back for us from the decline he describes. Certainly, *contra* Taylor, this will not be provided for MacIntyre by an articulation of the moral sources of liberalism - these hold out no hope, and certainly, *contra* Williams, this way back is a necessity if we are to avoid the absurd moral arbitrariness of the contemporary liberal society which he describes. In a subsequent chapter I shall discuss the grounds of MacIntyre's hyper-pessimism about the moral promise of modernity, as well as the account he provides of an allegedly coherent Aristotelian alternative. For now, however, I shall discuss the third and final challenge to the dominant forms of contemporary moral philosophy (and education) that I have considered. This lies in the 'ethic of care' discussed largely in the work of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings.

An Ethic of Care?

Modern moral philosophy has been dominated until recently by the Kantian and utilitarian traditions, and by the debates that have carried on between them. As I have discussed earlier, these schools of thought largely share a certain conception of the form that moral reasoning should properly take, whatever their disagreements about the normative implications of such reasoning. Although it is stressed most intensely in the work of Hare, 'doing morality' is generally taken by the representatives of these two traditions to be a matter of adopting an impartial stance between competing moral claims, subsuming these claims under the dictates of at least one universalizable moral principle, and of seeing moral action as obligatory duty in accordance with the requirements of principle outweighing all other considerations. Despite their differences, this is the conception taken by both Kohlberg and Wilson to be exhaustive of the moral domain, leading them to the conclusion that the only proper concern of moral education is to further children's capacities to reason in this manner. I have already referred to those theorists who have criticised either the controversial metaphysics underlying this conception (McDowell and Wiggins), or the way

in which its claims to validity rest upon a certain blindness of its own historical origins (Williams, Taylor and MacIntyre). In this section I would like to discuss those further writers who have sought to identify an alternative and distinct style of moral reasoning - another 'moral voice' - which is not reducible to the 'orthodox' conception. In the work of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings this 'ethic of care' is held to be something distinctively female, although much debate concerns the extent to which this additional claim is justified.

In the last chapter I referred briefly to the way in which utilitarian modes of moral reasoning might be thought to deform certain values by insisting upon their comparison against a single metric - that of utility. Many have claimed that values such as friendship necessarily resist being interpreted in this way so that anybody who could so compare the merit of responding to their friend's need with the utility derived from, say, campaigning for a change in government had not properly appreciated what it was to be in possession of the value of friendship. Utilitarian calculation and friendship are in this sense incommensurable.⁴⁸ It is not, however, solely the reductionism involved in comparing all values according to the utility they produce that may be seen to have an adverse effect upon our understanding of such things as friendship. The notion that morally worthwhile action is performed out of impartial duty to the requirement of moral principle, which utilitarianism shares with the tradition of post-Kantian moral theory (although the nature of their respectively valued principles will of course differ), is claimed to be equally damaging in itself. And this damage is not done just to our *concept* (as in the ignorance of incommensurability), but also to the objects of our moral concern themselves⁴⁹. Michael Stocker has offered the following notable example about being visited by a 'friend' when one is ill;

You are very bored and restless and at loose ends when Smith comes in once again. You are now convinced more than ever that he is a fine fellow and a real friend - taking so much time to cheer you up, traveling all the way across town, and so on. You are so effusive with your praise and thanks that he protests that he always tries to do what he thinks is his duty, what he thinks will be best. You at

first think he is engaging in a polite form of self-deprecation, relieving the moral burden. But the more you two speak, the more it becomes clear that he was telling the literal truth: that it is not essentially because of you that he came to see you, not because you are friends, but because he thought it his duty, perhaps as a fellow Christian or Communist or whatever, or simply because he knows of no one more in need of cheering up and easier to cheer up.⁵⁰

This kind of obligatory moral action, exemplary in form to the utilitarian or Kantian, would seem to be somewhat unsatisfactory⁵¹. We are not, on this account, inclined to see Smith as a true friend, or at least not to see this visit as an example of his friendship. The visit does not seem to spring from a concern with me as *me*, but as a feature of a situation requiring dutiful action. Without necessarily having to maintain that duty to principle has no moral role to play, we can see that certain values or virtues (we may think of compassion, love, whether parental, filial or sexual, and perhaps even patriotism as other examples) would seem to require release from the constrictive requirements of the orthodox conception of moral reasoning.⁵² The reasoning involved in their true expression needs therefore to make room for our responsiveness to particular persons within particular concrete relationships. It is our partial concern for a close person or group of people's need, rather than our duty to universal principles, that motivates us to act in a morally worthy way in such situations - and it is this form of motivation that makes the act worthy in the way that it is.⁵³ Even if the impartiality requirement is relaxed to admit of agent-relative reasons for action, the emphasis upon duty remains problematic. The moral concern we have for the people close to us should not simply outweigh that which we are expected to show for all of humanity (present or future), but should also be qualitatively different. Any theory of moral reasoning that did not allow for us fully to embody these care virtues would most likely serve to corrode our relationships with the people that surround us, and are most often implicated in our moral concern. If such relationships - whether they be with family, friends or colleagues - are corroded in this way, it is claimed, then so is the main foundation and location of our moral development and life.

Much of the current interest in the possible existence of an 'ethic of care' has resulted from the work in psychology of Carol Gilligan. This arose in reaction to her experiences as a researcher for Lawrence Kohlberg who, if we recall, posited the existence of distinct stages of moral development progressing from a pre-conventional level of egoistic avoidance of punishment, through a conventional level of loyalty and conformity to the people and institutions that one is surrounded with, to a final 'principled' level. This pinnacle of moral reasoning represented a person's attachment to the central virtue of justice as a means of solving ethical dilemmas. Kohlberg supported his ideas with numerous examples of the real-life response of children to hypothetical situations, the most famous of which is the case of 'Heinz and the druggist'. In this discussion two children, 'Jake' and 'Amy', are presented with the dilemma of a man (Heinz) whose wife is mortally ill and requires a certain drug for her cure, yet the druggist will only supply the drug (of which he is sole supplier) at a cost which is beyond Heinz's means. The children are asked whether Heinz should steal the drug to save the life of his wife. Jake answers that it is permissible for the drug to be stolen as "... a human life is worth more than money, and if the druggist only makes money, he is still going to live, but if Heinz doesn't steal the drug, his wife is going to die".⁵⁴ Amy's response however is far less conclusive. She claims that Heinz should neither steal the drug nor let his wife die, but instead find some other solution such as borrowing the money or pleading with the druggist.

From these responses Kohlberg concludes that whilst Amy can find no way out of the dilemma, Jake is well on his way to personifying the 'justice perspective' which can solve such problems by subsuming them under the requirements of ranked universalizable principles. In being closer to the Kantian ideal, his moral reasoning is therefore at a higher stage of development than Amy's conventionalist thought. It is the tendency for Kohlberg's work repeatedly to find boys to be more adept and developed moral reasoners that provoked Gilligan's critique. She claimed that the idea of morality being *solely* composed of

the justice perspective will necessarily judge women to be inferior at thinking in a moral way. In this sense Amy is indeed an inferior Kantian (at least on Kohlberg's particular reading of Kant), but this is not all she is. Gilligan maintained that the responses of women and girls to such hypothetical moral dilemmas exhibit a reluctance to engage in impartialist principled argument, abstracted from the demands of personal relationships. Instead, they see the moral domain as "a network of connection, a web of relationships, that is sustained by a process of communication."⁵⁵ Thus rather than merely being unable to 'solve the dilemma', Amy "considers neither property nor law but rather the effect that theft could have on the relationship between Heinz and his wife ... she ties the wife's survival to the preservation of relationships."⁵⁶ The way in which Amy (and women generally so it is claimed) engage in moral reasoning exhibits, for Gilligan, the existence of another 'moral voice' centring around the idea of care rather than justice, and a picture of the self as connected to particular others rather than as individualised and autonomous.

This threat to the supposed universality of the impartialist and principled conception of moral reasoning (a wider version of what Gilligan, following Kohlberg, has termed the perspective of justice) has met with much critical resistance. While some have resisted the notion that the supposed care virtues have any place within morality proper (unless when exemplified by impartialist reasoning), other defenders of the impartialist tradition have maintained in a variety of ways that the care virtues can find a home within their understanding of morality. Modern interpreters of Kant for instance, such as Barbara Herman and Onora O'Neill, have stressed the extent to which impartial reasoning acts as a testing mechanism for our moral views and practices, rather than as a source of them. This allows for the idea that the care virtues can take an important and distinctive (although still inferior) place within morality as long as they do not violate the side-constraints set by universalizable principles. A number of feminist writers have also wished to deny the existence of any alternative moral voice especially if it is claimed to be distinctively female.

They claim that it is only the domination of women by men that has produced a deficit in their manner of moral reasoning (by, for instance, confining them to the private realm), and that to proclaim the equality of 'care' is merely to cement this subservience. When the dominant tradition of philosophy has generally regarded women to be incapable of moral thought, the role of feminism on this interpretation is not to celebrate this inequality in the name of 'difference', but to protest against the conditions that have produced it.

If we were, however, to accept the idea that there are varieties of authentic moral understanding that cannot be accommodated within the dominant impartialist tradition we are left with the question of how far these are tied to gender. In other words, is care a solely female 'moral voice'? Although many have taken this impression from Gilligan's work, it never seems to have been her intention to make such a claim. Although 'care' may unsurprisingly be exhibited most often by women and undervalued most often by men (for reasons to do with their typical social roles), there is no reason to think that men are in some way incapable of appreciating the special values of love, friendship and the like. Some writers have seen this as allowing us to conceive of a broader understanding of morality able to encompass both impartiality and care in situations where they are properly called for.⁵⁷ In her more recent work however, Gilligan has maintained that care and justice are not ordinarily synthesised into a wider form of moral thought, but instead present distinct but equal ways of approaching any given moral problem. Referring to Wittgenstein's famous duck/rabbit figure (a picture which can be seen as representing either of these two creatures, but not both simultaneously) she suggests that we all possess the ability to approach moral problems according to either the care or justice perspective, and to switch perspective if required. Utilizing a musical metaphor, she describes them as 'counterpoints' to each other, and as together comprising a 'double fugue'.⁵⁸ This has raised the further possibility that there may be more than merely two of these moral voices, and that racial, cultural or class differentials may be equally as important as gender for their

analysis.⁵⁹ Once this thought is combined with the idea that the voices are not tied in any way to the identity with which they are most associated, and that we may actually be able to create our own moral 'bricolage' from the multitude of moral voices available, it shows signs of departing along radically relativist or postmodern trajectories.⁶⁰

So far we have considered two broadly defined ways in which the idea of care may be understood. Firstly, there are those who have sought to either downplay its moral importance altogether, or to present it as important but inferior to impartialism. Secondly, there are those such as Gilligan herself who have stressed the equality of the care perspective with other ways of approaching moral problems, or at least (in a more relativistic style) denied that any moral voice can be proven superior or inferior to any other. This leaves us with a third way of approaching the issue - that the challenge of 'care' may demonstrate either the inferiority or the unimportance of impartialism. There may therefore be a way in which Gilligan's work is rather too kind on the impartialist tradition. We may wish to see the justice perspective as problematic in itself rather than simply to deny its sole occupancy of the moral domain, thus leaving it intact in all other respects. Indeed, it has been argued that Gilligan's stress upon the centrality of actual articulated responses to abstract moral dilemmas as the key to understanding moral perspectives leave her in the shadow of Kohlberg's work despite her critical intent.⁶¹

The idea that 'caring' may be the primary and central model, at the expense of an impartialist morality of principles, is found most especially in the work of Nel Noddings. For her, morality is based upon the core experience of the mother-child relationship.⁶² This embodies what she calls 'natural caring' - a situation in which the attention of the carer is focused solely upon the 'cared-for', and our motivation is comprised of their needs. The intensity and ease of our caring gradually declines as we move away from family relationships and towards mere acquaintances or strangers - the domain of what she calls 'ethical caring', which comes to us unwillingly as an obligation. Although Noddings would

seem right to assert against the impartialist that it is impossible to think that we could care for all people equally, she does seem to underestimate the extent to which we value care for strangers as an ethical ideal. This is especially so if, for example, the stranger is unable or unwilling to reciprocate our care, or if they exist outside of all our circles of close care - when they are thus a stranger to us all (we could perhaps think of a refugee). In such instances, Nodding's idea of care does not appear to reach out far enough.

In another way, however, such care would seem to encompass too much of our moral thought. The care we have for those people close to us (most especially our children) is most certainly deeply felt, but does not always push out of the way reflection concerning its appropriateness. Although the affective, emotional dimension of our moral experience has been unduly denied by impartialist thought, this does not mean that it should be emphasised at the expense of denying our ability to subject it, and the social norms our emotions express, to rational criticism. Jonathan Dancy provides an example;

... these notions [of care] are very important indeed, for those who fail to see their centrality are people who will be blind to the real nature of the moral choices they have to face. But ... care itself can be abused, and acting out of care, or making the caring choice, need not always be the right choice. An instance that occurs to me here is that of a husband whose care for his wife is so great that it effectively suffocates her, preventing her from making something of herself for herself. We might think in such a case that it would have been better if he had acted more out of respect and less out of care.⁶³

It would seem that this possibility of care being the wrong response to certain moral situations (rather than being exactly what a moral response *is*, in the way that Noddings presents it) is of particular interest in those relationships where adults have responsibility for children - the most obvious examples being parenting and schooling. It may pain a child to have to do things for themselves, or to have to attend their mathematics lessons, but we know that this is in their long-term interest. Teachers and parents are continually faced with the problem of judging when children should be protected from harmful influences, and when they need to gain experience of the 'ways of the world' in order for them to make

their way in it at a later date.⁶⁴ Of course, the proponent of care may maintain that it can encompass such prudential considerations, but that would seem to allow questions about when exactly the child for whom we are responsible will feel the benefit of our caring. Should we allow a child to play instead of study because of the present satisfaction they receive, or encourage them to study so that they might lead a more fulfilling life in the future? It would seem natural here to claim that we should be temporally impartial about when such benefits as there are will be cashed out (or at least that there is nothing wrong with this being one consideration amongst others) but of course caring on Noddings' view can allow impartiality no place at all. To allow it even such a benign role as this is simply not an option.

But surely, the idea that there are times when it is a more sober response than full blown care which is required by the situation does not need to concede anything to impartialist theories of the sort I have been criticising. They represent merely one idea (and a particularly extreme one at that) of what it is to stand back from the intensity and tumult of a situation and reflect upon it. We may adjust our moral gaze to take in wider features of the situation without having to agree to the irrelevance of the concrete and particular. We may sometimes even be impartial without having to become 'impartialists'. This view is supported by Bernard Williams who insists that "... it is quite wrong to think that the only alternative to ethical theory [a problem solving morality of impartial principles] is to refuse reflection and to remain in unreflective prejudice. Theory and prejudice are not the only possibilities for a reflective agent, or for philosophy."⁶⁵ This holds out the promise of a description of proper moral reasoning which, while rejecting central aspects of the dominant impartialist tradition, does neither over-identify it with gender difference nor over-emphasise the place of the care virtues at the expense of fairness. Despite the extent to which the different theorists I have been considering in this chapter disagree greatly with one another, their views have provided resources for the more positive articulation of an

alternative conception of morality, a central feature of which is a certain antipathy to the way in which ethics has been so often presented as a matter of adherence to principles of conduct.

Principles and Particularity

Our everyday thinking about morality would seem to preserve a central place for principles. A paradigmatically 'moral' individual is most often characterised as a man or woman who is principled. Whatever inducements to the contrary there may be, nothing will deflect them from acting in accordance with their moral duty. The most obvious example of a set of moral principles in our culture is of course the ten commandments. A life lived in accordance with these is thus both principled and, some might claim, fully moral. We may of course disagree with this assessment, and maintain that this particular moral code is not entirely correct. We might want to add some other principles to the list to cover up possible loopholes that would make immorality seemingly permissible. Equally, we may think it preferable to reduce the list of principles to one general aim - say the promotion of utility. Yet, whatever way we alter the list, such a conception of what it is to live morally is still phrased in terms of adherence to a principle or list of principles.

It may seem strange, therefore, that I should seek to investigate an idea (that of particularism) that is best understood in terms of its hostility towards this way of understanding moral commitment. Such hostility might seem to be a product of some kind of amoralism. If one attacks the very notion of moral principles, surely that is to attack morality itself? It would thus be hard to see how such an idea could be useful in the formulation of an approach to moral education. In this section I seek to show how such fears are unwarranted. Particularism, in its various guises, is not hostile to moral principles in the more plain and ordinary sense, but only to the place they occupy within certain modern ways of thinking about morality and moral thinking. It can therefore acknowledge

the importance of principles in, say, the training of the young or as rough and ready rules of thumb without weakening its case against the idea that principles provide the primary and exhaustive means of understanding morality.

As I have already said, moral action is often articulated in terms of its fit with certain general principles. A shopkeeper who tells the truth about the condition of some of his 'damaged goods' even though it could have been concealed is seen to prize the principle 'do not lie' over possible financial benefits of doing otherwise. Similarly, a person who promises to help a friend move house, and still does so despite the subsequent appearance of a more attractive proposition elsewhere, is thought of as someone who prizes the principle that 'promises are to be kept'. We might thus consider the proper role of moral education to be one of encouraging adherence to such admirable principles, and to those rules which allow us to subsume the features of new and perhaps more complex situations under their requirements. Even if we were wary of promoting adherence to any particular principle and so, in a concern for the moral autonomy of children, sought to provide them with the ability to make moral decisions for themselves, the decision procedure could still be characterised in the same way. As exemplified by the work of Kohlberg and Wilson, moral thought could be conceived as being an intellectual process of seeing which of the principles we have encountered in the past apply best to the novel situation in which we now find ourselves. An action is right only if it is derivative from the requirements of a moral principle statable in universal terms (so that the relevant features of the situation count the same every time they are present). Therefore, if the facts of a situation reveal that a child is being attacked in the street, we will be able to see that their subsumption under the requirements of the two principles I have discussed will tell us little, and that there may therefore be another principle that will guide action here. This might perhaps be an injunction that we should 'always seek to protect the innocent from injury'.

So far, so good. Difficulties arise, though, when principles come into conflict. We may not want to break the injunction concerning lying when a friend asks for information about the whereabouts of her husband, but feel duty bound not to break the promise of secrecy you gave to him on this very matter. In such a situation we would seem to be at a loss concerning the right course of action, and no longer possess recourse to proper reasons for our chosen course of action. This might seem to allow irrationalism too far into our ethical lives. The provision of reasons to guide us in such situations (and so to combat moral irrationalism) is the ambition of what has come to be known (at least by its adversaries) as moral or ethical *theory*. This ambition is clearly articulated by R.B. Brandt at the beginning of his *Ethical Theory*: ‘What is ethical theory about? Someone might propose as an answer: “Everyone knows what an ethical problem is; ethical theory must be about the solutions to such problems”⁶⁶

Moral theory holds out the promise that in instances of moral conflict the force of certain principles can be conclusively shown to outweigh that of others and thus provide a guide for action. The simplest way to attain this is of course to claim that all the various principles to which we claim allegiance are actually instantiations of one more general aim. This *monistic* solution is most prominently represented by utilitarianism. On these grounds the apparent problem of whether to lie or break one’s promise is solved by appeal to the amount of utility that would ensue from each course of action (however this is calculated). If honesty might lead to the break up of a marriage and the unhappiness of children, then honesty may not be the best policy. Utilitarianism thus subsumes all moral problems under the requirements of a single universalizable moral principle. Alternatively, moral theory in the Kantian tradition stresses the way in which moral principles are ordered in a systematic hierarchy, whereby one’s reasoning in times of apparent conflict should refer to the successively more general principles which outweigh those under consideration, and can recommend the correct action. This is the form of reasoning that Kohlberg (following Hare)

has advocated as the basis for understanding moral development, and is exhibited in the lauded response of the male child (Jake) to the 'Heinz and the druggist example' we encountered earlier.

As I have suggested already, there are a number of reasons why we may not be fully satisfied with this answer to the problem of moral conflict. We may instead wish to preserve some of the importance that instances of moral conflict have for us in our ordinary thought and experience - that conflicts are not mirages, but real and potentially tragic. One of the ways in which this importance is most clearly felt has been discussed by Bernard Williams as the issue of 'rational regret'. For Williams, the attachment of moral theory to the idea that such conflicts are always fully resolvable can make little sense of the way in which we ordinarily feel regret for the course of action we have not chosen, even if we have made the right choice by not acting in that way. For utilitarians, we must simply ascertain which choice would maximise utility, while for Kantians, we must act out of obligation to the more general principle which our reasoning identifies. On neither of these accounts, is it rational to feel regret for not honouring a particular obligation, if it turns out that there was a greater obligation to act otherwise, and in a way that makes the first course of action impossible. Williams maintains that such types of moral theory are at fault for not leaving space for the notion that the first obligation can in some sense continue to apply, and that our non-compliance can be a legitimate reason for regret. This point is made even more acute if we think of the most extreme forms of moral conflict when there would seem to be no reason to think why it would be better to act in one way rather than another (a dilemma), or where the values on either side of the dilemma are so incommensurable that the compensation we may have from choosing one course of action (however large) could never match the value of the action we passed over (a tragic dilemma). The force of the latter kind of instance derives from the sense that whichever decision we come to, we will always have to commit some wrong.

Critics of ethical theory thus charge that its desire for systemisation and simplicity misrepresents our ethical experience. The presence of tragic dilemmas, it is argued, is no mere chimera to be resolved by recourse to superior methods of moral reasoning (such as that of Hare's archangel), but is in actual fact something central to our ordinary moral lives. Indeed, as Martha Nussbaum has argued, we would be rightfully distrustful of a politician who, when faced with a necessary decision between two appalling courses of action, did not feel any sorrow or regret for the wrong that will inevitably result.⁶⁷ We may appreciate the politician's admirable resolve in the face of such a difficult choice - for we surely do not want to be led by those who would recoil in such situations. We may also come to the conclusion that he or she made the right decision, and deserves praise for this, or at least should not be *blamed* for the wrong that results. Yet despite this, "we also want them to preserve and publicly display enough of the Aristotelian intuitions of the ordinary private person that they will say, here is a situation in which we are violating an important human value."⁶⁸

Although these reflections cast some doubt upon the ambition of the moral theorist to find a systematic and foolproof decision procedure for the resolution of ethical quandaries, it has not yet been claimed that the place of principles is problematic in itself. There is in fact no reason why an ethic of principles could not jettison the loftier ambitions of the 'theorist' and yet still claim to be an appropriate method of moral reasoning. McNaughton and Dancy have both discussed the 1930s work of WD Ross as an example of just this approach.⁶⁹ Ross claimed that reference to general moral principles informed us as to what our *prima facie* duty was in any given situation. Thus if we are asked to keep a promise, we are duty-bound to act in accordance with the principle which states that one should 'always keep promises'. When two moral principles apply to a situation however, and we cannot possibly act out of duty to both, there is no systematic and foolproof decision procedure which can guide us in choosing the right course of action. All we have recourse to in situations such as

these is to pay close attention to the precise characteristics of the particular context in which the decision is called for. When our *prima facie* duties conflict then, according to Ross, this is precisely what good ethical judgement consists in. Little more can be said.

This understanding of the complexity of moral thought preserves the importance that tragic dilemmas and the rational regret that results from them have for us. For the particularist, therefore, it represents a considerable advance over the utilitarian and Kantian theories that have dominated modern thinking about morality (and moral education). Their central complaint, however, is that Ross has still preserved too important a role for the appeal to general principles. In a number of ways, particularists have sought to downplay their importance yet further.

The view that moral thought should proceed according to a deductive model, whereby a moral action is justified by reference to a principle which has general application (such as 'do not lie' or 'always keep promises'), is held to be importantly deficient. This model holds that whenever the features of a situation are such as to bring one of our moral principles 'into play', the same non-moral facts will have the same result in every other situation. This should make certain that our principled action is not unfairly partial towards ourselves or those close to us, and that we are not swayed by the presence of morally irrelevant factors. Thus, if we condemn the fact that we were deceived about the state of some damaged goods we have purchased, we must concede that this type of lie is wrong irrespective of who it harms and in what circumstances the lie is told. The problem for the particularist lies in the way that this model discourages attention being paid to the particular concrete specificities of each moral situation (which Ross thought was only required in situations of moral conflict). The same objection also arises if principles are not part of a deductivist schema, but provide an element within a coherentist methodology of 'reflective equilibrium'.⁷⁰ This model rejects the strict one-way flow of deduction in favour of a dialectical means of moral justification in which principles provide reasons for action in

particular instances *and* these particular judgements contribute to the specification of that principle. Despite this, however, nothing has been said to disabuse us conclusively of the notion that moral principles are indeed legitimate providers of reasons for action.

In addition to the problems involved in maintaining complete impartialism that were discussed in the last section, we may feel that the antecedent formulation of these moral principles ill-equips the moral agent to deal with the new and unexpected features of the successive circumstances in which their application is called for. Moral situations would often seem to possess a potential to outrun the possibility of their being translated into the language of principles. Agents may very well understand that a certain moral principle is relevant, but the situation may differ so sharply from all previous cases in which it was called for that the capacity to apply it correctly is severely hindered. In response to such situations, it is likely that knowledge of a set of general principles is less helpful than (or is at least partly dependent upon) a ruleless ability or skill to respond in the way that is called for by this *particular* situation. This is the virtue identified by Aristotle as *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom'. In this sense, recourse to general principles can leave our moral action heavily underdetermined.⁷¹

Another problem with the generality of principles is the possibility that the non-moral facts about a situation which lead to it being thought of as wrong, or lead to a certain type of action being obligatory, may mean something quite different on another occasion. If this is right, it would seriously undermine the idea that principles can be constructed which affect themselves whenever certain facts are present - that the alteration of other facts cannot stop us thinking that, for instance, a lie is still a lie because if a fact matters morally it must, *ipso facto*, matter everywhere. Jonathan Dancy suggests that although the creation of pleasure for people is normally taken as a reason *for* doing something, if people took pleasure in watching public executions this would quite possibly be a reason *against* having them.⁷² The presence of the pleasure in each of these instances, therefore, means something different

depending upon the character of the surrounding situation. The claim that the behaviour of a reason in a certain situation cannot be adequately predicted by reference to its behaviour in other and previous situations, leads to a stress upon the importance of a *holistic* conception in which the behaviour can only be understood in terms of its relationship with all the particular and concrete features of the context of moral agency. Once again, the place of principles within such an account of moral thought would appear redundant, but rather than being due to the possible underdetermination of judgement, the problem here would tend to be that a reliance upon moral principles would result in action being overdetermined, uniform and unyielding.⁷³

Nonetheless, these considerations still do not prove the case against the advocate of an ethic of principles. For they may, as RM Hare notably has, draw a distinction between the *generality* and the *universality* of principles. So far we have discussed the problems involved with the use of moral principles that guide action over a large amount of cases and tend therefore to overlook the concrete specificities of each situation to which they are applied. Such principles are general in scope. It is not necessary, however, for principles to have these characteristics in order to have universal form - for all this requires is that the principle will apply to all cases that are relevantly similar. Although the principles we most readily think of as universal ('do not lie', 'do not kill' etc.) also exhibit generality, there is no reason why universal principles may not be highly concrete and detailed. So detailed in fact, that it may be unlikely that they would ever come into use again (although it must of course be a possibility that they could). These latter kinds of principles are indeed the ones that Hare considers to be most exemplary in form.⁷⁴ Although constructions of this kind would seem to finesse criticisms concerning the over-abstraction or over-generality of principles, they would seem to run into further difficulty. Most obviously, it is hard to see how a morality composed of a multitude of such concrete universal principles could avoid being inordinately unwieldy. As Martha Nussbaum has put this - "An ethical science with

‘principles’ this context-specific would have to have a vast and infinitely extensible series of principles; and this is not a science that will satisfy those who are looking for science.”⁷⁵

We might therefore conclude that there is little reason to salvage the primary place of principles within moral reasoning. When they have the virtues of simple rules of thumb (of which the educational advantage is clear) and offer the promise of direct guidance, their abstract generality seems to make them both (almost paradoxically) insufficient aids to our moral choices and strict unsympathetic masters. Yet when the problems involved in the quest for simplicity and generality are eased, there would seem be little necessary attraction to them at all. With sets of principles of either type, the scope required for the non-rule-governed faculty of *judgement* would seem to be so extensive in bridging the gap between principle and right action that we may sense that this kind of uncoded ability is a more appropriate locus of ethical thought than deductive reference to the principles themselves.⁷⁶ When such criticisms are allied with a meta-ethical rejection of non-cognitivism (the idea that moral statements cannot be true or false), the case against moral principles becomes even more pointed and radical. Although the case for or against principles is in no way tied to any particular view on this issue, so that writers such as Ross could be firmly cognitivist concerning ethical principles, it is notable that recent moral philosophy and (to an even greater extent) thought about moral education has entwined the principled approach with a meta-ethical non-cognitivism. This serves to increase yet further its vulnerability to particularist challenge.

The formal and procedural account of moral reasoning propounded by non-cognitivists in recent times has established consistency as its master virtue. If there is no truth of the matter about an ethical judgement, then the fact that someone makes the same judgement whenever a certain natural fact is present in the situation (say the breaking of a promise) gives us at least a certain amount of confidence that they are reasoning in a rational manner - that their judgements track those features of the situation to which they claim to pertain.

We therefore come to understand the moral stance of a person by seeing what facts these are that consistently attract their moral approbation or disapprobation. Even moral cognitivists such as Ross saw the advantage that an ethic of principles had in promoting the intuitive sense we have that features which matter morally in one situation must matter similarly in all others. We have already seen how some have challenged the idea that such features must matter in the same way in every situation (however different) and have sought to stress the way in which context may alter a feature's moral importance. If, though, we include moral as well as non-moral facts within the possible description of the situation, our attachment to the sense of consistency described above might become yet more tenuous.

This line of criticism is developed by John McDowell as the thesis of 'uncodifiability'. He argues that the problem with models of moral reasoning which centre around the appeal to principles is not that they over-determine our actions in particular concrete instances, but that they are, in fact, incapable of guiding us at all. This is because moral choice is not a matter of subsuming particular cases under more general principles, but is, on McDowell's view, a process of discerning the salient and overriding *moral* features of a situation which count in favour of a certain judgement.⁷⁷ And this is a process which resists linguistic codification as "any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalisations will be approximate at best, and examples will need to be taken with the sort of 'and so on' which appeals to the co-operation of the hearer who has cottoned on."⁷⁸ In allowing that agents may be guided by moral as well as non-moral facts about a situation, this subverts the idea that a consistent evaluative response to the same set of non-moral facts produces a guarantee of consistency in moral judgement. The consistent appeal to stable moral principles would therefore no longer be necessarily indicative of integrity. And, as McNaughton has concluded,

... if there is nothing that all wrong actions have in common except that they are all wrong, then this account of the utility of moral principles [that they guarantee consistency] must be mistaken. The only method of arriving at correct moral

conclusions in new cases will be to develop a sensitivity in moral matters which enables one to see each particular case aright. Moral principles appear to drop out as, at best, redundant and, at worst, as a hindrance to moral vision.⁷⁹

We are left to wonder whether moral principles can be of any use at all. Has being 'principled' ceased to be a virtue and become a vice? This would seem to be a very odd suggestion, and one to which it is not impossible to respond. For what I have been engaged in questioning here is the idea that correct moral reasoning proceeds deductively from general or universal principles⁸⁰, *via* a process of situational judgement, to particular actions. I have maintained that principles, thought of in this sense, do not prove efficacious in enabling the moral agent to decide correctly, and that thinking that they do may even prove to be harmful to such decisions. This is to apply equally to any notion that principles possess a priority in decision even if the strictly deductive method is relaxed.⁸¹ There should be nothing contained within such criticisms, however, to threaten the commonplace idea that good ethical thought and practice may usefully be thought of as, in part, conforming to certain general rules and principles. This would allow us to see the virtue of 'being principled' consisting not in the subsumption of all ethical choice under the dictates of moral rules, but as a sign that the principled person's moral choices are of such a consistency and reliability that they can conveniently be seen as examples of a certain rule.⁸² As such, it is a commendation that expresses part of what we would want to mean by the virtue of integrity - the possession of a firm and steady commitment to the morally good. We might even think of correct moral judgement as *instantiating* such rules and principles, as long as we do not think of this instantiation as being the best or fullest account of our *aim*. Our aim should simply be to make the correct choice - a task for which appeal to principles is of little or no assistance. Martha Nussbaum takes a similar view:

We must notice first that rules could play an important role in practical reason without being prior to particular perceptions. For they might be used not as normative for perception, the ultimate authorities against which the correctness of particular choices is assessed, but more as summaries or rules of thumb, highly useful for a variety of purposes, but valid only to the extent to which they

correctly describe good concrete judgements, and to be assessed, ultimately, against these.⁸³

Surely one of the more obvious of purposes for which these ‘rules of thumb’ may possess a certain usefulness is moral education. For this represents the process by means of which children come to acquire those various kinds of knowledge and ability (cohered into dispositions or states of character) which enable them to make reliably good practical judgements. Although I shall elaborate upon the more precise features of this developmental process at a later point, it is understandable that children who have not yet acquired these aspects of character will have to be provided with some fairly reliable means of simulating the choices which they would have made were they to have possessed such aspects. For it is only by having experience of performing ethically virtuous actions (the habituation that constructs our ethical ‘second nature’) that we become able to see for ourselves when and where they are truly appropriate, and act reliably in such a way out of pleasure taken in intrinsic goods for which the actions are performed. Within this (as we shall see) largely Aristotelian conception of a good moral upbringing, the following of rules may provide just such a reliable method of simulation. They are by no means the ideal guide for ethical judgement, but they are better than nothing at all.

Adults may, for example, have been taught the rule ‘never touch the hot stove’ as children, but no longer feel the need to refer to it in achieving the same end. It is not that the rule is no longer necessary for us adults (as ‘don’t talk to strangers’ would be), and nor is it merely that the rule has been internalised (as we are also now capable of acting in a contrary manner when the situation demands it without endangering our commitment to the end the rule is designed to serve). Although it may seem strange for children to witness an adult who has taught them a rule acting in a way that transgresses it, we are able to think of no better way to enable the child to think and feel in the more mature way we adults do than to inculcate these simple rules. We consequently teach a child to prize a principle such

as 'do not lie', not just in the hope that it will continue to follow it, but that it will provide a basis for the child to experience the pleasure acting in such a way involves (where this is assisted by encouragement, and perhaps by appropriate punishment meted out upon those occasions when the principle is willfully ignored) and become more and more able to act in an honest way without needing to refer to the rule at all.⁸⁴ It is not the principle we want to be cherished forever, but the honesty (or, rather, the truth). Once we have 'ethical lift-off' as it were, the rule may (and should) be cast aside as something we have outgrown.⁸⁵

This conception of what is involved in the development of a child's moral thought and feeling allows us to diffuse the common contemporary understanding of the conflict between indoctrinatory approaches and those which centre around a concern for a child's autonomy. This is a conflict most often thought to concern the question of whether we should rest content with inculcating a certain set of moral rules in the minds of children, or whether we should instead prefer to provide them with the skills necessary to create rules for themselves in response to rapidly changing circumstances. What we are now able to see is that the appeal to rules is a mere stage (albeit a necessary one) within a long and perhaps unending process of character development. Of course, the efficacy of rules within this process will to a large degree depend upon the kind of behaviour being encouraged or discouraged. In the case of a rule such as 'do not lie', it is unlikely that there will be too much of a problem in knowing what kind of deed (or abstinence from such) is appropriate to its demands, given that it is known that this is the sort of case when such a rule applies. But this does not seem to be the case with other rules, such as 'always be fair and just' or 'never disrespect your elders'. The kinds of behaviour which we would wish to promote *via* the teaching of such rules would seem to resist such easy codification - for what actually represents fair or respectful behaviour upon this or that particular occasion? The extra demands which such virtues make of our judgemental ability to interpret what the principle

requires in particular concrete situations requires that their educational treatment is appropriately differentiated from virtues such as honesty.

Consideration of the principle 'always be fair and just' may also, however, indicate a sense in which rules have a place even when they appear to represent inappropriate codifications of complex particular judgements. This derives from the fact that 'justice' is a virtue particularly central to *political* rationality, and thus to that part of moral education which deals (as it must) with the education of moral *citizens*. Bernard Williams draws attention to this as follows:

In particular, modern complex society functions which are ethically significant are performed by public agencies and, if the society is relatively open, this requires that they be governed by an explicable order which allows those agencies to be answerable. In a public, large and impersonal forum 'intuition' will not serve, though it will serve (and nothing else could serve) in personal life and in a more closely shared existence.⁸⁶

We encounter a similar thought in the work of Joseph Raz who argues that:

In mass, highly mobile societies, public authorities are particularly ill-adapted to judge matters in which having the right feelings, the proper moral sensibilities, is of particular importance. They are more suited to dealing with abstract principles, with general rights and duties, than with matters of moral character, personal relations, etc.⁸⁷

Although we may not wish to characterise forms of moral judgement ungoverned by rules as 'intuition', the point is well taken that becoming *au fait* with politics (as one must if one is to act morally in that part of life) is, to a great extent, a process of becoming *au fait* with the public rules and principles around which political life is organised, justified and understood. This is not, of course, to claim that political judgement is best approached as a rule governed enterprise, or that the content of such rules and the extent to which they are embodied in action is the only relevant consideration in the evaluation of political morality. Instead, what I am trying to maintain here is that we should not attempt to advocate a model of moral education which, for all its advantages, may produce a situation in which politics

becomes more and more an arena that is separated from our ordinary moral experiences and the wisdom we build upon these. In an age when politics seems to centre increasingly around technocratic reasoning at the expense of moral claims, we should be wary of compounding this process. It is perhaps true that the only way to avoid this is to retain the reference to rules and principles as part of moral education. There is obviously very much more to say on this topic of the relationship of moral education and politics. For example, it is not entirely clear why the condition of politics in modern society should mean that we need to reformulate our ideas about virtue and its acquisition. We must surely retain the possibility that it is a criticism of contemporary society that is required so that it is fitting to our best understanding of what morality and moral education should be. And in the light of the close relationship which holds between education and the society in which it operates, it is likely that moral education will be one of the main vehicles of any attempts at reforming social development in the wake of such criticism. I shall subsequently deal with some of these political concerns in the greater detail they evidently require.

An elaboration of the alternative moral standpoint which I have been alluding to throughout this chapter will evidently need to be more explicit concerning certain central issues. For instance, if there is no central position retained for moral principles, how precisely do we work out the morally correct course of action, or when the action of others is reprehensible? Is an emphasis upon dispositions of character rather than upon action alone necessary? How, if at all, can the ethical role of the emotions be of help? Dealing with these and other issues is part of the portrayal of a broadly neo-Aristotelian view of the moral life and moral reasoning. Also, to ensure that I do not stray too far from the main point of these reflections, I should draw attention to the ways in which these themes might impinge upon issues of moral development and education. All of this shall be the concern of the next two chapters of this thesis.

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- ¹ I use the term 'analytical' in a particularly broad manner, mainly to differentiate the work I shall consider here from that with a more 'historicist' bent. I am aware that it is a term of some great controversy, and that many may doubt that some of the neo-Aristotelian philosophers to whom I refer truly merit this particular epithet.
- ² This does not imply a commitment to naturalism in its more commonly used form - the view, roughly, that all that is real is explicable by the methods of the natural sciences (and those disciplines modeled upon them).
- ³ Foot, P 'Moral Beliefs' in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 1958-9.
- ⁴ Foot, P *Virtues and Vices* (1978, Berkeley, University of California Press) introduction *passim*.
- ⁵ Foot, P 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' in *Philosophical Review* 1972.
- ⁶ Geach P 'Good and Evil' in *Analysis* vol. 17 1957.
- ⁷ Mackie, J.L. *Ethics : Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977, Harmondsworth, Penguin).
- ⁸ Cf. Brink, D *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (1989, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); Boyd, R 'How to be a Moral Realist' in Sayre McCord G (ed.) *Essays on Moral Realism* (1988, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press); Railton, P 'Moral Realism' *The Philosophical Review* 1986.
- ⁹ Cf. McDowell, J 'Virtue and Reason' in *The Monist* July 1979, 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-following' in Holtzman and Leich (eds.) *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (1981, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul); 'Values and Secondary Qualities' in Honderich, T (ed.) *Morality and Objectivity* (1985, London, Routledge); Wiggins, D *Needs, Values, Truth* (1987, London, Blackwell) esp. chs. 4 and 5, Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* (1993, Oxford, Blackwell). David McNaughton's *Moral Vision* (1988, Oxford, Blackwell) is a sympathetic overview.
- ¹⁰ McDowell, J 'Virtue and Reason' *op. cit.* p. 346.
- ¹¹ McDowell, J 'Values and Secondary Properties' *op. cit.*
- ¹² *Ibid.* p. 114.
- ¹³ McDowell, J 'Virtue and Reason' *op. cit.* p. 331.
- ¹⁴ The perception of the moral reality can be seen as presenting a course of action that either *outweighs* other possible considerations, or is *exhaustive* of possible responses. McDowell argues that the latter is a mark of the virtuous person - moral reality *silences* all else. This is essentially the same as the distinction Aristotle draws between the truly virtuous person and the *enkrates* (or merely continent person). Cf 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?' in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* vol. 52 1978.
- ¹⁵ Little, M 'Recent Work on Moral Realism, Part II' in *Philosophical Books* vol. xxxv no. 4 1994.
- ¹⁶ McNaughton, D *Moral Vision op. cit.* pp. 113-4.
- ¹⁷ Non-cognitivists would explain away moral judgements by describing them as a 'projection' of these sentiments onto the morally neutral world. This is, in Hume's words, a "gilding or staining" of "natural objects with the colours borrowed from internal sentiment". Although Wiggins applauds Hume for having treated seriously the very real amount of consensus on moral matters (something the vulgar subjectivist would ignore) he argues that "surely such a sentiment of approbation cannot be identified except by its association with the thought or feeling that x is good (or right or beautiful) and with the various considerations in which that thought can be grounded, given some particular item and context, *in situ*." Wiggins, D *Needs, Values, Truth op. cit.* Essay 5 p. 188.
- ¹⁸ The possession of these *capacities* is understood to be very widespread within any particular cultural perspective. This is not to say that such capacities are always exercised in the fullest and most appropriate manner.
- ¹⁹ Little, M 'Recent Work on Moral Realism, Part II' *op. cit.* p. 229.
- ²⁰ Wiggins, D *Needs, Values, Truth op. cit.* p. 193.
- ²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 204-5.
- ²² But, as Hilary Putnam has remarked, "... if our 'objectivity' is objectivity humanly speaking, it is still objectivity enough" *Reason, Truth, and History* (1981, Cambridge, CUP) p. 168.
- ²³ *Ibid.* pp. 208-9.
- ²⁴ In her *Natural Reasons: Personality and Polity* (1989, Oxford, Oxford University Press).

- 25 Williams, B 'What Does Intuitionism Imply?' in his *Making Sense of Humanity* (1995, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 191 n.7. Williams has also complained that McDowell is 'unconcerned' with history and that "It is significant that in a discussion of the virtues that mostly relates to Aristotle, he takes as an example kindness, which is not an Aristotelian virtue" *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985, London, Fontana) p. 218 n.8. Wiggins' approach seems generally to be rather more historically informed.
- 26 It is hard to say whether such historicist arguments are committed to a form of moral realism, or how close they may lie to such a doctrine. Although Williams allows that the use of 'thick' ethical concepts can properly be termed a form of knowledge, his stress upon cultural deviation and his regular disagreements with theorists such as McDowell indicate that he is committed to no form of realism in the more metaphysically loaded sense. MacIntyre's more recent stress upon the values of Thomism a moral doctrine capable of proving itself superior to all others seems to have moved him further in this direction, despite him also stressing the impossibility of truth *sub specie aeternitatis*. Lastly, Taylor has actually gone so far as to describe himself as a moral realist, but has loosened his grasp on this epithet in the face of critical objection.
- 27 MacIntyre and Taylor have held out most hope for narrative as a means of rational justification. This idea is also central to work of Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Dancy. Cf. MacIntyre, A *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988, London, Duckworth); Taylor, C *Sources of the Self* (1990, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); Nussbaum, M *Love's Knowledge* (1990, Oxford, Oxford University Press); Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* (1993, Oxford, Blackwell).
- 28 Williams, B *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy op. cit.* ch. 10 *passim*.
- 29 *Ibid.* p. 192.
- 30 *Ibid.* p. 182.
- 31 Taylor, C 'A Most Peculiar Institution' in Altham J and Harrison R (eds.) *op. cit.* p. 134. His choice of the 'good' rather than 'importance' perhaps reflects a more metaphysical or religious concern than Williams.
- 32 Taylor, C *Philosophical Papers vol II* (1985, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 3.
- 33 He has carried out this task in most depth in his large book *Sources of the Self op. cit.*
- 34 It is thus roughly the same as McDowell's usage of 'scientism'.
- 35 Taylor, C 'The Diversity of Goods' in Sen, A and Williams, B (eds.) *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (1982, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 131.
- 36 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue* 2nd edition (1984, London, Duckworth) p. 23.
- 37 *Ibid.* pp. 20-21.
- 38 *Ibid.* p. 6.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Mulhall, S and Swift, A *Liberals and Communitarians* (1992, Oxford, Basil Blackwell) p. 78.
- 41 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 50.
- 42 Cf. Anscombe, A 'Modern Moral Philosophy' in *Collected Philosophical Papers vol. III* (1981, Oxford, Basil Blackwell). In this seminal paper Anscombe maintains that the legalistic concepts of 'right' and 'obligation' so often employed by contemporary moral philosophers (especially those of a Kantian or utilitarian bent) make little sense in the absence of a notion of a 'divine law'. The work of Anscombe's husband, Peter Geach, is as I remarked earlier, similarly suggestive.
- 43 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 55.
- 44 Taylor, C 'A Most Peculiar Institution' in Altham, J and Harrison, R eds. *op. cit.* p. 151.
- 45 In a recent footnote Williams writes (cartoonishly) that "Taylor and MacIntyre are Catholic, and I am not; Taylor and I are liberals, and MacIntyre is not; MacIntyre and I are pessimists and Taylor is not (not really)." 'Replies' in Altham, J and Harrison, R *op. cit.* p. 222 n. 19.
- 46 Williams, B *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy op. cit.* p. 148.
- 47 *Ibid.* p. 200.
- 48 This is the shape of an argument presented by Joseph Raz, in his *The Morality of Freedom* (1986, Oxford, Clarendon).

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- 49 As well as to ourselves of course if we were to take the neo-Aristotelian view that certain varieties of ethical living (in this case friendship or *philia*) were essential to what it is to live well as a human being *as such* (rather than merely one who values friendship).
- 50 Stocker, M 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' in *The Journal of Philosophy* 63 1976 p. 462.
- 51 Although the nature of the normative principles which are seen to follow from this shared conception of moral reasoning is the main issue separating Kantians (or 'deontologists') from utilitarians, they do differ in certain other ways. The conception of moral actors as equal, autonomous, and rational beings, abstracted from social encumbrances is central to Kantian moral theory but not to utilitarianism. Much of the so-called liberal vs. communitarian debate of the 1980s concerned the deficiencies of this vision of selfhood as discerned most especially in the work of John Rawls.
- 52 Lawrence Blum writes that; "Care virtues involve a coherent and intelligible form of moral motivation and moral understanding not founded on moral principle or impartiality. This claim cannot be refuted by showing that the same action that is motivated by care or compassion *could* have been generated and motivated by a moral principle; for this by itself would not preclude the action's having been performed from a motive expressive of care particularity. This claim does not take issue with the notion that important virtues are expressible through impartiality and principle. It takes issue only with impartialism and principle-based theories' frequent aspiration to take over the whole domain of morality, claiming to have articulated the one and only 'moral point of view'. In addition, there are some morally good actions for which no explanation for or grounding in principle or impartiality is possible." Blum, L *Moral Perception and Particularity* (1994, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 200.
- 53 Advocates of this view often reject the emphasis upon action as the sole topic of moral concern that is central to utilitarian and post-Kantian thought. The care that we have for others can therefore be morally praiseworthy even if no action results from it (perhaps it becomes suddenly unnecessary or impossible to perform), and a person who did not feel this care could be adjudged as lacking something morally. It is a different matter of course, if we fail to act in accordance with our care when it was possible to do so, or if the action that results from our care is misguided or inappropriate. Equally, moral action is only taken to be wholly praiseworthy if it involves an affective dimension of the right sort in its motivation. This does not, however, threaten the idea that one may be mistaken in morality (a central tenet of moral cognitivism) - a certain situation can be seen as making appropriate only certain kinds of caring response. Importantly, this caring response is neither wholly rationalistic nor wholly affective, but a combination of the two - whether this is an emotionally enlarged faculty of reason or a collection of different faculties of both types.
- 54 Gilligan, C *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press) p. 26.
- 55 *Ibid.* p. 33.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 29.
- 57 This is the resolute hope maintained by Michael Stocker in his 'Duty and Friendship : Toward a Synthesis of Gilligan's Contrastive Concepts' in Kittay and Meyers (eds.) *op. cit.* See also Shogan, S *Care and Moral Motivation* (1988, Toronto, OISE Press) for a similar view.
- 58 Cited in Hekman, S *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (1995, Cambridge, Polity Press) p. 69.
- 59 Cf. Blum, L 'Gilligan's Two Voices and The Moral Status of Group Identity' in his *Moral Perception and Particularity op. cit.*
- 60 This is the direction in which Susan Hekman's interpretation of Gilligan seems to be moving.
- 61 Flanagan and Jackson, for instance, have maintained that; "The relationship between first person speech acts and the underlying psychology is a widely discussed issue in contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive psychology, and there is reason to think that our deficiencies in giving accurate self-assessments run very deep. Confabulation is an especially salient worry when the speech acts are being offered in response to issues which connect so obviously as do moral problems with issues of self-worth and with how one is perceived by others. Gilligan and Kohlberg are strangely silent on these matters" in 'Justice, Care and Gender : The Kohlberg-Gilligan debate revisited' *Ethics* 97 1987 p. 628.
- 62 In this view, Noddings is greatly influenced (as Gilligan has been) by the work in psychological theory of Nancy Chodorow. See her *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978, Berkeley CA, University of California Press).

⁶³Dancy, J 'Caring About Justice' in *Philosophy* 67 1992. We might also imagine how someone on the receiving end of care, perhaps a person who receives special favours from an authority figure on account of their personal relationship, might feel embarrassed and guilty about being cared for in this way.

⁶⁴ And it is part of my criticism of contemporary theories of moral education that this kind of experience cannot simply be gained in a classroom as though it were always a purely intellectual concern.

⁶⁵ Williams, B *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* *op. cit.* p. 112.

⁶⁶ Brandt, R.B. *Ethical Theory* (1959, Englewood Cliffs N.J., Prentice Hall) p. 1.

⁶⁷ Nussbaum, M *Love's Knowledge* (1990, Oxford, OUP).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 65.

⁶⁹ Cf. Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* (1993, Oxford, Blackwell); McNaughton, D *Moral Vision* (1988, Oxford, Blackwell); Ross, WD *The Right and the Good* (1930, Oxford, Clarendon).

⁷⁰ This is the term used by John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice* (1971, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press) p. 20.

⁷¹ This problem involved in the use of general principles is discussed by Martha Nussbaum *op. cit.* p. 71.

⁷² Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* *op. cit.* p. 61.

⁷³ This aspect of the case against principles is supported by at least two writers with reference to a polemical passage from *The Mill on the Floss* by George Elliot:

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgement solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality - without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human.

Cf. Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* *op. cit.* p. 70-1; Johnson, M *Moral Imagination : Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (1993, Chicago, University of Chicago Press) p. ix .

⁷⁴ Cf. Hare RM *Moral Thinking* *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ Nussbaum, M *op. cit.* p. 67. Some may claim that the early (pre - *Moral Thinking*) work of Hare is not susceptible to accusations of being unwieldy. For it might be argued that Hare's is a *logical* thesis, rather than being, as many have thought, a *moral* one. On this reading, universal principles do not need to be thought of as the temporal antecedents of our moral thinking, but as what our reasons and judgements commit us to. Although such a line of argument may be effective in finessing this particular objection to an understanding of morality centred around principles, it would seem to lead to a bifurcation of the practice and the logic of moral thought, leaving little idea of how we may bridge the gap. In this sense, we may read Hare's later work as an attempt at just such 'bridge-building'.

⁷⁶ Recent Kantian theorists have maintained that judgement is a supple enough faculty to unite close attention to concrete particulars with a reasoned obligation to universal principles. This view, they claim, derives from a proper reading of Kant's own work. Onora O'Neill, for instance, points to the following section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

General logic contains, and can contain, no rules for judgement ... if it sought to give general instructions how we are to subsume under these rules ... that could only by means of another rule. This in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgement. And thus it appears that, though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgement is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only, and cannot be taught.

A132-3/B173 as quoted in O'Neill, O *Towards Justice and Virtue* (1996, Cambridge, CUP). The place of judgement in Kantian ethics is also a prominent theme in the work of Barbara Herman. Cf. her 'The Practice of Moral Judgement' *Journal of Philosophy* vol. 87 no. 8 1985. The particularist model I am outlining goes further, however, than any account of such a judgemental faculty, by focusing upon the perceptual or attentive capacity that identifies the moral features of the situation which judgement would subsequently subsume under the requirements of principle (if we were to keep principles in the picture at all).

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- 77 'It is by virtue of his seeing this particular fact rather than that one as the salient fact about the situation that he is moved to act by this concern rather than that one ... A conception of how to live shows itself, when more than one concern might issue in action, in one's seeing or being brought to see, one fact rather than another as salient' McDowell, J 'Virtue and Reason' in *The Monist* 62 1979 p. 344.
- 78 *Ibid.* p. 343.
- 79 McNaughton, D *Moral Vision op. cit.* p. 62.
- 80 Together with any formation that abstracts from the specificities of a particular case, although it is hard to see why reasoning from such a principle would be attractive if it were not of universal form.
- 81 This would thereby exclude both 'reflective equilibrium', where principles have a role in reforming our ordinary judgements, and Ross's *prima facie* principles, which hold only to the extent that they do not conflict with each other.
- 82 A rule holding, of course, only within the context of a necessary amount of moral agreement.
- 83 Nussbaum, M *op. cit.* p. 68. One can find a similar view in the earlier writings of Michael Oakeshott. In his *Rationalism in Politics*, for instance, he insists that moral principles 'are merely abridgments, abstract definitions, of the coherence which approvals and disapprovals themselves exhibit' (1962, New York, Basic Books) p. 105.
- 84 This might variously result from a developed ability to perceive when the salient moral features of the situation call for this variety of moral action, a progressive silencing of competing considerations, or an increased judgemental capacity to choose the most appropriate manner of action.
- 85 We must of course allow for the possibility that some people will never be able to throw off their dependence upon rules.
- 86 Williams, B *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (1980, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 81.
- 87 Raz, J 'Liberalism, Scepticism, and Democracy' in *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics* (1994, Oxford, Clarendon) p. 104.



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Chapter Three

An Aristotelian Alternative I: Practical Judgement and Moral Perception

I should have by now achieved certain of my aims. I began by discussing in some detail the various theories that have been intended to guide our contemporary practice in the field of moral education. From this discussion I have concluded that despite their professed differences they are all, in the end, inadequate for notably similar reasons. To investigate the source of these deficiencies, and in the hope of being able to discover some more adequate approach to moral education, I have ‘situated’ these theories within the context of contemporary moral philosophy of the neo-Kantian tradition, drawing attention to some of the critical challenges which this tradition has faced. In this and the next chapter I shall return to the focus of my initial concerns by offering a broad account of a potentially more promising approach to moral education, based upon a very different manner of conceiving moral thought and practice. This approach will derive to a large degree from a reading of Aristotle’s ethical work, together with more recent writing in the neo-Aristotelian tradition. Although I do not intend to be overly programmatic in this task, I shall discuss in turn some of the most notable themes which demarcate this alternative account from those which still form the main foundations for contemporary understanding of moral education.

In beginning to search for ways of theorising a more adequate approach to moral education, we must of course begin with a clear understanding of our aims. What, therefore, is our conception of a morally educated person, or to put it another way, what are the moral failings or inadequacies we would wish to see children avoid possessing, or which we would want to educate children *out of*? For many of those remarking upon a perceived moral decline of our society, the answer to such question is that large numbers of today’s children “do not know the difference between right and wrong”, and that it is the task of

moral education to make clear the nature of this important distinction. The approaches I have discussed up to this point, together with the alternative I shall adumbrate here, have all attempted to rectify this problem in their own distinctive ways. We may therefore be able to discern some of the important differences between competing approaches by reference to those kinds of moral failure which they take to be paradigmatic, and those which their pedagogic methods are chiefly designed to counteract.

Values Clarificationism, as we have seen, considered itself to be an attractive means of engaging in moral education whilst avoiding the dangers of either indoctrinating some particular moral content, or giving in to the socially prevalent dangers of amoralism and nihilism. It deemed success to consist in enabling children to decide freely upon their own values, whatever these values turned out to be. Its paradigmatic forms of moral failure were consequently those in which judgements of right and wrong were unknown, thought to be irrelevant or unimportant, or were 'unclarified'. The notion that "not knowing the difference between right and wrong" might be consistent with an ability to make fully clarified value judgements where these judgements are *mistaken* is excluded entirely. Teachers have value only in assisting the efficient development of a child's chosen values, not in interfering with their content. For this latter practice would involve judging the merits or demerits of particular valuations - a matter with which teachers cannot or should not involve themselves.

As judged against this understanding of the nature of moral failure, Kohlberg's theory came closer to a more intuitively acceptable account in stressing the development of those mechanisms which govern the correct use of moral language. On this view, it is perfectly possible that a child's lack of knowledge concerning the 'difference between right and wrong' may be exemplified by a value judgement that could be deemed faulty according to the rules which govern the logic of such utterances. They might, for instance, not fully understand the need to avoid self-contradiction in one's value judgements, either by issuing

wildly varying judgements on the same moral issue, or by failing to appreciate the intimate connection between one's moral prescriptions and one's actions. On such occasions, teaching the rules of moral language use would seem to be exactly what we expect from moral education. Yet against other forms of moral failure, the 'intellectualism' of Kohlberg's theory (and John Wilson's for that matter) would seem to lack such bite. Against the proto-amoralist, who thinks moral concerns are irrelevant to their choices of action, it does not explain quite why we should care to engage in what they call genuine moral reasoning. For this, as for the problem of *accidie* (in which a moral sense is not missing, but dulled by depression or the like) it would appear to have no more chance of success than VC (although the 'therapeutic' style of the latter may place it in a potentially superior position). Equally, Kohlberg's theory does not satisfactorily explain why we should subsequently care to act on our moral reasonings at all - thus threatening its success at countering weakness of will (when a person fails to act according to their honestly avowed intentions). In adhering to a strict bifurcation of belief and desire, and in considering education to be solely a matter of development in the former domain, such approaches encounter severe difficulties in answering questions of this sort.

In countering the challenge provided by the wicked or immoral, both Hare and Kohlberg have held out the hope that a developed commitment to the logical procedures of moral thinking will make it unlikely that people would remain committed to antisocial viewpoints on pain of inconsistency. This was, of course, the only hope available for them, as they both took the view that morality was not a domain in which judgements could be deemed true or false as if they were natural facts. There was consequently no logical limit to the range of evaluations to which I may choose to be committed. Hare maintained that the amount of 'fanatics', as he described those who would allow that their antisocial views should apply to them in the same way they apply them to everyone else, would be trivially small. This has been a point of concern for many critics who have not been reassured by

Hare's reply, and remain convinced that we require a stronger bulwark between what are, and what are not, acceptable moral views. This would connect to the intuitive view I offer here that teaching the difference between right and wrong should extend somewhat beyond the limits of the Hare/Kohlberg approach to this issue.

In these two chapters I hope to show how a moral education that rejects some of the main features of both of these approaches will be better able to deal with the kinds of moral failure (actual or potential) which we wish to counteract in an educational context.

Crucially, I would wish to challenge the intellectualist idea that moral failure most often results from the possession of wrong *beliefs* concerning moral questions - that the child we would wish to reform is the one who would respond: "If I were faced with a choice between being cruel and being kind, I would choose cruelty". This is where the idea that moral education is precisely a matter of teaching the difference between right and wrong can be misleading if taken, in the way the approaches I have discussed do, at face value. For the gap between cruel behaviour (or being a 'cruel' person) and this sort of belief tends to be far larger than those wedded to an intellectualist approach imagine it to be, so that it is highly unlikely that educating children *out of* such beliefs and the reasoning that produces them will do all the work we require from moral education.¹

As I shall claim subsequently, the difference between the virtuous and the non-virtuous person cannot always be explained in terms of corresponding differences in the propositional content of their beliefs. For it is quite possible for these propositional contents to be identical, but for their moral responses to differ greatly. Moral education, therefore, is not just a matter of encouraging children to 'know' such moral distinctions, but to appreciate them fully in a manner which is evident in the very way they live out their lives. We might say that we wish for them to know these distinctions in a way which pervades not only their intellect, but their whole character. As such they form part of Aristotle's key virtue of practical wisdom.

Once we reject the questionable philosophical assumption that thin moral descriptions (such as ‘good’ or ‘right’) have a necessary priority over thick descriptions (culturally embedded terms with an unavoidable empirical element such as ‘honest’ or ‘courageous’)², we may find it easier to conceive of moral education as being less about the development of formal procedures, and more about the promotion of children’s ability to recognise when and where these thick descriptions are made appropriate by the concrete features of particular situations. So rather than asking whether or not we can properly classify a refusal to protect a friend from attack as the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ thing to do, we should ask whether or not such an act is actually an example of ‘cowardice’, and how our recognition of this may further enhance our specification of what sort of vice cowardice in fact is. It is this process of learning to recognise, prize, further specify, and act upon a whole array of these ‘thick’ moral terms (virtues and vices) that, on my alternative account, properly constitutes ‘moral development’. For it would make little difference if a child was able to reclassify cowardice as ‘right’ rather than ‘wrong’, if he or she remained unable to recognise cowardice for him or herself when it was present, and see it as involving them in the task of moral judgement. The moral terrain which we hope to enable children to negotiate is constituted by the whole battery of such concepts we have available to us, and it is essential that they are brought to recognise their shape before their journeys can begin in earnest.

It is one of the more serious deficiencies of both Values Clarificationism and the intellectualist approaches of Kohlberg and Wilson that they claim to develop children’s moral reasoning without attending to the development of their character as moral *persons*. Moral education must properly concern not only how we think, or what we do, but also *who we are*. As Joel Kupperman has pointed out:

The mistake of such theories results from the separation of the growing person from the process of skill acquisition. To treat a student’s preferences at a certain stage as basic, incorrigible data is, in effect, to regard the student as incapable of growth. Such an assumption may well promote the result it assumes.³

This disavowal of character development underlies the view that Kohlberg formed from his reading of studies by Hartshorne and May. He maintained that because teaching children a 'bag of virtues' was shown to have little of the intended influence upon their behaviour it must therefore be a pointless exercise. This of course ignores the fact that we are in the process of developing children into virtuous *adults*, and that it is at this time of maturity that the benefits of an education of character would be expected to be cashed out. It is as though the difficulty of the question concerning what type of person we would wish children to become has led us to prefer them staying as they are. This surely represents a mere abdication from the responsibility of the moral educator.

As we have seen in the last chapter, central to this reconception of the nature of moral education is the thought that the rational construction of universal principles which are then used to guide moral decisions perhaps represents an inappropriate and ineffective model of reasoning to act as its basis. A contrary model which stresses attention to particulars will be advocated as a means of more adequately coping with the variety of moral failures ill-addressed by orthodox approaches. A key addition derives from a rejection of the non-cognitivism basic to Kohlberg's and Wilson's view of morality. The thought that the world may contain moral properties to which we may be responsive or unresponsive adds a further and prior form of possible moral failure to those encompassed by the practice of judgement conceived as the bridging of principle and particularity. This concerns the possible failure of moral *perception*, *attention* or *vision* - the faculty or faculties which allow us reliably to pick out the salient features of a situation which make appropriate judgement possible.

Crucial for the articulation and educational development of this perceptual ability will be an understanding of the nature and role of the emotions beyond the *logos/pathos* or belief/desire dichotomy evident within mainstream post-Kantian moral philosophy. They will be conceived as aspects of character which assist, and are often partly constitutive of,

the achievement of certain moral goods, so that their possession (or absence) can provide legitimate reasons for moral evaluation of that person, irrespective of whether or not they contribute to the performance of a moral action. This represents part of a more general shift in focus from the evaluation of moral *action* to that of the character of moral *agents*. It is hoped that this will assist in a better understanding of, and response to, the problems of moral motivation I have discussed. For it has been a central problem of the intellectualist approaches to moral education that they have provided no satisfactory explanation of why the promotion of moral reasoning should have any necessary effect on the standards of moral behaviour at all.⁴ With all of these matters in mind, it may be right for us to reject as an aim of moral education that children should ‘know the difference between right and wrong’, and instead see our intended enterprise rather as Edmund Pincoffs has - as a matter of “becoming the right sort”.⁵

An Aristotelian Approach to Ethics

The discussions of the last chapter have led us towards the general conclusion that the centrality of moral principles to moral education has too often been exaggerated.

Approaches which grant them an exalted position, such as those advocated by Kohlberg and Wilson, risk overlooking what is most important and basic to morality (the practices, values and virtues, expressed in concrete and particular situations, which underlie appeals to principles), and failing to explain adequately why their preferred educational methods should have any necessary effect upon the moral conduct of young people. Other than in brief references to the necessary place of perceptual and judgmental faculties in moral reasoning, however, I have not yet provided a full account of how we should alternatively conceive such reasoning, as well as the proper role and content of moral education. It is therefore incumbent upon me in this chapter to go some way towards the provision of just such an account. As I have already stated, this will emphasise a particular interpretation of the nature and role of judgement and moral perception. It will also stress the role to be

played by the affective or emotional dimension of life. These are ideas which play either an insufficient or non-existent part within the approaches advocated by Values-Clarification, Lawrence Kohlberg and John Wilson, but are central to the account of ethics provided by Aristotle, and developed today by numerous philosophers (including David Wiggins and John McDowell).⁶ Before I begin to discuss these concepts in more detail, it may be useful at this point to provide a general introduction to the Aristotelian manner of approaching both moral philosophy and education, for it is this which will form a basis for the account I will present here.

Aristotle's work on this subject matter, contained for the most part in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, was importantly *teleological*, in that discovering what was good about something was to discover the nature of its end. Just as 'good' for a knife consisted of its excellence for cutting, and a 'good' farmer was one who excelled in the cultivation of crops and herds, Aristotle held that human beings as such could similarly be said to possess a distinctive end or *telos*. The task of ethics for Aristotle, as with all Greek thinkers, was to investigate the nature of this end, and the range of excellences ('virtues' or *arete*) that served to bring it about. This view departs strongly, therefore, from the dominant understanding underlying much of the twentieth century's thought on ethics (as well as the approaches to moral education which I have considered up to now). Found in Hume's aphorism (probably derived from Pierre Bayle) that reason is merely 'the slave of the passions', and famously expressed by Moore as the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy', this understanding held that evaluative questions were so different in kind from factual or descriptive questions that it would represent an error to attempt to infer a value from a fact or description. In denying such a bifurcation, Aristotelian ethics thus presents strong affinities with the contemporary forms of moral realism to which I have referred previously.

The *telos* for which men characteristically aim was thought by Aristotle to be that of *eudaimonia*. This is the ultimate good which we desire for its own sake and for the sake of

which we desire other things. Although it is often translated as 'happiness', this may misleadingly suggest that it is to be identified with subjective feelings of pleasure or joy. Terms such as 'the good life' or 'well being' are thus perhaps rather better attempts to grasp Aristotle's meaning. Aristotle held the nature of man's *eudaimonia* to therefore be "an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence of virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete".⁷ It is not a static condition, but a practical way of engaging in the activities of life - exemplified by the reasoned and character revealing responses given at times of ethical deliberation (*bouluesis*) and choice (*prohairesis*). The role of the virtues is to effect the transition of man from his ordinary untutored state, to the condition of well-being - a state neither innate nor unnatural, but requiring the efficacious development of man's natural, primitive capacities. The purpose of moral education understood in this Aristotelian manner will be to assist this very development of those capacities which allow for man to attain those virtues pertaining to the moral life. Indeed, the explicit intention of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was for it to serve as a guide for prospective statesman in the carrying out of this political task of citizen education.

Despite this focus upon the 'production' of virtue, we must nevertheless be careful not to think of the virtues and their acquisition as a means to the end of well-being as though they could each be specified independently. Moral education does not have manipulation as its aim, and should not be organised as if it were a simple matter of furthering the most productive and efficient means of achieving a certain end. This would create a false affinity with modern examples of teleology such as utilitarianism, where the end (utility) can be specified independently of the means that are chosen to pursue it. For it is an important part of Aristotle's view that an *internal* relationship holds between the virtues and well-being whereby the former are constitutive of the latter. *Eudaimonia* cannot be specified other than through the engagement in those practices which form its component parts. In this sense, the good life simply *is* the virtuous life of displaying excellence in those very

practices. It is the internality of this relationship between means and ends that marks the chief distinction between Aristotle's two kinds of practical (as opposed to theoretical) knowledge: the technical knowledge (*techne*) involved in production (*poiesis*), and the kind which is implicated in action proper (*praxis*), excellence in which Aristotle terms *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom'.

Just as the mind was, for Aristotle, separated into rational and non-rational elements, the virtues were correspondingly classified as either intellectual (acquired through teaching) or moral (acquired through habituation and training). Through such habituation (*ethismos*), the moral virtues become settled dispositions of character as opposed to the mere abilities or skills that comprise *techne* (although both skills and virtues develop through practice). One of the ways in which these two categories are best distinguished is through the observation that the possession of a skill seems no different to performing those actions characteristic of a skilful man. If one were to simulate a champion archer by scoring just as many points as he did, it would make little sense to maintain that one was not similarly skilful. This, for Aristotle, was because "works of art (*techne*) have their merit in themselves; so it is enough for them to be turned out with a certain quality of their own."⁸ In other words, the possession of a skill is not endangered by the state of the person who performs the skilful acts (unless, of course, the act was a mere accident). Importantly, however, a distinction does seem to exist in the case of moral virtue. If one were to act in the same way as an authentically courageous person, this would be no guarantee that one was in possession of the virtue of courage. This is at least partly due to the importance of the motivational aspect - that one must choose virtuous actions for their own sakes (*prohairoumenos di' auta*).⁹ One may, for instance, be acting for the sake of a financial reward or from fear of punishment or even to display one's athleticism. All of these motivations would serve to make the apparently courageous action merely calculative rather than fully virtuous. It is essential to

virtuous action, that it arises from a correctly patterned set of motivations - the development of which is the basis of good character.¹⁰

It was also important, for Aristotle, that virtuous action is performed in full knowledge of the facts of the situation. Ignorance of the thinness of the ice may be a reason why an action performed to save a dog stranded in the middle of a frozen lake is perhaps best characterised as one exhibiting the character trait of recklessness as opposed to courage. A truly virtuous person will act not only for the right reason (*to kalon* or 'for the sake of the noble'), but also in a way that consistently and unchangingly exhibits a mean between the vices of deficiency and excess (in the case of courage, these would comprise of cowardice and recklessness). Rather than a plea for moderation in all cases, as many have taken this to be, the doctrine of the mean instead stresses that although there is only ever one way of making the virtuous choice in a particular situation, there are a multitude of ways to make the wrong one. Another important distinction between virtues and skills arises from the differing extents to which they are grounded in the habitual qualities which comprise a person's character (or, as Aristotle put it, "a fixed and permanent disposition"¹¹). For instance, we might have little problem in saying that someone is a truly skilful archer even though they no longer engage in this pursuit (assuming, of course, that their skillfulness had not diminished in that period), whereas we would not say that the same person is a kind man even though his behaviour no longer exhibits kindness. Moral education aims at the production of kind people, not people who have the skill of being kind at their disposal as long as they choose to exercise it. In this sense, virtues are not detachable from the composition of a person's character in the way that skills can be.¹² One of the upshots of this is that a person may be held responsible for the presence of many of those factors which may prevent him or her from choosing and acting virtuously - a responsibility that does not occur in cases of failure to act in accordance with a skill. As Sarah Broadie interprets this point:

It is not in general the proper business of the builder as such to have made sure that he is not so upset that he cannot operate, any more than it is his business *qua* builder to make sure that his body is healthy. But it is, Aristotle thinks, the proper business of the *prohairesis* agent to be in whatever emotional condition is necessary for him to function well.¹³

Because of these motivational and situational aspects of virtue, the focus of Aristotelian ethics is not upon rules or principles which govern right conduct, but upon the ‘man of good character’ (the *spoudaios*). It is therefore an approach which fits well with the particularist ideas I discussed in the last chapter. One may gauge the virtuous course of action in a particular circumstance by attempting to understand the way in which a virtuous person would have chosen to act in just such a situation. The man of good character will act consistently in the right way, for the right reason, and will have his passions tempered so harmoniously that a disposition towards virtuous action becomes an unchanging part of his character - his ‘second nature’. Virtue comes easily to him. In some ways, however, we have conflicting thoughts about this latter aspect of virtuous character. Philippa Foot, for instance, has drawn attention to the way in which we often think that the struggle to act courageously that is ongoing within someone who is sorely tempted by cowardice or external temptation to act otherwise, serves to make their courageous action rather more heroic and praiseworthy than that performed by someone to whom it comes easily because of their lack of fear. This would indeed seem to fit with the idea that being a human ‘excellence’, virtue must in some sense be difficult. Foot seeks to resolve this difficulty by attempting to differentiate virtues in order to see that “some kinds of difficulty do indeed provide an occasion for much virtue, but that others rather show that virtue is incomplete.”¹⁴ She claims, for instance, that there is an important difference when honest action involves a struggle against temptation to steal whether such a temptation arises from a defect of character, or from features of the situation such as one’s poverty. In the latter case she concludes, “difficulties of this kind make honest action all the more virtuous.”¹⁵

Despite the intuitive appeal of her view, I fear that Foot may be mistaken here. For there would seem to be little difficulty with characterising the ideally virtuous agent as one whose passions are harmoniously tempered to such a degree that contrary temptations to virtuous action do not happen to arise (in McDowell's terminology, they are *silenced*), whilst continuing to regard the heroic struggle of the poverty-stricken with the temptation to steal as importantly praiseworthy. This is especially so if one is mindful of the way in which Aristotle's ethics focuses upon the development of virtue as much as anything else - a process in which praise, as well as similar responses such as exhortation, admonishment or scolding have an important role to play. It would seem that Foot too easily conflates this praiseworthiness with virtue itself. We may even preserve the idea that the choices of the virtuous agent (as examples of excellence) must be difficult, just as it is difficult to hit a 'bull's eye' in archery, as long as we do not insist that they must necessarily be difficult for the agent themselves. Even though we may characterise temptations towards vice as understandable, and the overcoming of them as deserving of praise, there should be little obstacle in the way of understanding moral education as the production of virtuous agents in whom these contrary desires just cease to arise.

Later on, I shall make more reference to the way in which an Aristotelian conception of the place of the passions or emotions within the moral life departs greatly from the view underlying much of recent philosophy and educational theory. We shall come to see that the 'tempering' of which I have made passing mention should not be understood as though it meant 'mastered by the intellect'. For Aristotle the expression of the right emotional response on the right occasion and to the right degree (in accordance with the mean exhibited by the man of good character) was an importantly constitutive part of what it is to be virtuous. Before turning to such matters, however, I should discuss the aspect of the 'rational part' (the *logistikon*) which is most apposite to our present concerns - the virtue of *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom' which represents excellence in the form of knowledge that

pertains to *praxis*. This intellectual virtue occupies a pivotal position in Aristotle's understanding of morality, in that its acquisition allows a person with a certain moral aim to deliberate most profitably concerning the course of action it would be best to follow in order to achieve that aim. Since the exercise of *phronesis* results in morally right action, the *phronimos* (the practically wise man) must also possess all of the moral virtues in order that his deliberative excellence is not reduced to the status of mere cleverness (in the particular sense that a murderous stalker may be 'clever'). In their relation to *phronesis* therefore, the virtues are a unity.¹⁶

The Perception and Deliberation of the Practically Wise

Given its importance for any attempt to articulate a model of moral education, I need to say rather more about quite what it is that properly constitutes the virtue of practical wisdom. This is a topic about which there has been much academic controversy in the recent past, with a number of philosophers quite self-consciously attempting to 'rescue' Aristotle from the grasps of his neo-Kantian interpreters. This controversy has revolved around a particular difficulty of exegesis of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning his account of proper deliberation (*bouleusis*) and choice (*prohairesis*) that are the essential character-revealing marks of *phronesis*.¹⁷ In the third book of his *Ethics* Aristotle attempted to describe the sort of practical reasoning appropriate to moral questions by utilising an analogy with technical reasoning. It is characteristic of this sort of thinking that an end is pre-determined (whether by prior deliberation or not) and held steady, while practical deliberation concerns only the choice of those courses of action which would be most causally efficacious in bringing it about. In the analogous moral case:

We deliberate not about ends but about means. A doctor does not deliberate whether to cure his patient, nor a speaker whether to persuade his audience, nor a statesman whether to produce law and order; nor does anyone else deliberate about the end at which he is aiming. They first set some end before themselves, and then proceed to consider how and by what means it can be attained.¹⁸

His conclusion that “the object of deliberation, then, cannot be the end but must be the means to ends”¹⁹ has been the cause of much confusion. In a certain way it is rather uncontroversial. Just as a teacher would not seem to deliberate *whether* to educate the children in her class but, rather, deliberates upon the question of what means to employ to ensure that they are best educated, one would not seem to deliberate properly upon whether or not to seek the good but upon the question of how best it is sought. As the *Ethics* is explicitly presenting an account of deliberative excellence concerned with the end of action (*praxis*) rather than with theoretical knowledge (*theoria*), these observations seem to be sound enough. Difficulties arise when one considers quite how moral deliberation would proceed in such a manner. It would seem that the question of how to achieve well-being in general, or how best to be courageous, patient, or just is not always simply a matter of selecting appropriate means for the achievement of an independently specified end, but also a question of what that end is, or of what course of action best constitutes that end.²⁰ The question of ‘how should I be courageous here?’ thus often seems to be the same as ‘what makes for courage in this situation?’ Indeed, the very nature of many of the practices within which ethical deliberation is called for would seem to make it impossible for an end to be specified prior to the deliberation concerning how to achieve it in that specific case. The internal and constitutive relationship between means and ends in the case of moral virtue (to which I referred earlier), would seem to make the technical deliberative model redundant in the moral case.

Recent commentators have, however, drawn attention to the way in which such difficulties are diffused if we reject the “means to an end” translation that is found in WD Ross’ version of the *Ethics*²¹, and derives largely from the 19th century scholarship of Julius Walter.²² For this would seem to import an untoward Humeanism into Aristotle’s ethical outlook, whereby reason simply considers the ways of best achieving the ends antecedently

set by desire. David Wiggins, for instance, has suggested that Aristotle's words here are rather better translated as "what is towards an end". Together with the idea that his technical analogy was intended merely to utilise an example of deliberation familiar to his audience (rather than to function as his model), this would seem to allow us to read Aristotle as maintaining that we do not reason whether or not to achieve our end, but about what our ends are in the particular circumstance in which we have to make our choice. Yet there are a further set of problems here again, concerning how this less instrumental form of deliberation properly proceeds. Conflict arises between those favouring a neo-Kantian model, based upon deduction from general principles to the particular case, and its critics, concerning Aristotle's more complex discussion of *bouleusis* and *prohairesis* in his sixth book (concerning virtues of the intellect). The issues here mirror those I have discussed in the last section concerning particularity.

The neo-Kantian interpretation here is referred to by John McDowell as the 'blueprint picture', and by Sarah Broadie as the 'Grand End' view²³ - one which is once again furthered by a distinctive translation by Ross. Aristotle describes the reasoning of the man of practical wisdom endeavouring to 'hit the mean' in a deliberative situation as being in accordance with *orthos logos*. This is rendered by Ross as 'right rule', and by other translators as 'right principle'²⁴, thus implying that the *orthos logos* represents a deliberative procedure whereby the features of particular cases are subsumed under the requirements of more general principles.²⁵ If this was Aristotle's intended model, it would appear to fit well with his claim that practical wisdom involves having grasped a universal end (*eu prattein* or 'doing well'), and having the deliberative excellence (*euboulia*) necessary to bring that end to bear upon particular cases (what the aspiration to well-being demands *here*) through *prohairesis*. There is on this picture, therefore, a 'blueprint' of the universal that is available to reason independently of our attempts to instantiate it in practice.²⁶ Yet this view seems to be quite contrary to some of the other things Aristotle has

to say about the nature of the deliberation excellence in which forms an essential part of practical wisdom. In the second book of the *Ethics*, for instance, he states that:

Now questions of conduct and experience have as little fixity about them as questions of what is healthful; and if this is true of the general rule, it is still more true that its application to particular problems admits of no precision. For they do not fall under any art or professional tradition, but the agents are compelled at every step to think out for themselves what the circumstances demand, just as happens in the arts of medicine and navigation.²⁷

And later in the same book;

... it is not easy to define by rule for how long, and how much, a man may go wrong before he incurs blame; no easier than it is to define any other object of perception. Such questions of degree occur in particular cases, and the decision lies with our perception.²⁸

Contrary to the case of *techné*, where the craftsman operates with a particular image of his end (his product) when he chooses his tools and methods, it would not seem to be possible for Aristotle (according to these statements) to have countenanced the idea that the virtuous person similarly possesses a grasp of their end independently of the choices they make in its service. This would appear to lend support to the particularist thesis that ethical reasoning is improperly characterised in terms of deduction from general or universalizable principles. There is just something about the subject matter of ethics that cannot be captured in this way. This being so, *orthos logos* is perhaps better rendered as 'right reason', thus losing its associations with deductive accounts of moral reasoning. It is certainly not that *phronesis* represents a kind of everyday moral thought, as though there existed a superior level to which we may have recourse if the situation is such as to demand it. Rather, this particularist model of practical wisdom represents precisely what ethical excellence is. This, incidentally, would serve to make Hare's recent claim that his classification of 'two levels of moral thinking' derives from Aristotle amongst others appear a somewhat fanciful suggestion.²⁹

If this deductive model is not ideally fitted to be a guide to Aristotle's intended account of good deliberation, how should we characterise what it is to bring the universal end to bear upon particular circumstances of choice? One possibility that has been advocated by Wiggins and McDowell amongst others³⁰, is that the decisions made by a person who possesses the perceptual and motivational propensities characteristic of the *phronimos*, are themselves incidences of this 'bringing to bear', even when that which is brought to bear is not appealed to in any deductive sense. The universal conception of well-being is therefore not something that can be grasped or attained independently of the possession of just these aspects of character. To grasp the universal simply is to see aright in particular circumstances. Or, as McDowell puts it, "... there is nothing else for a grasp of the content of the universal end [a correct conception of doing well] to be except a capacity to read the details of situations in the light of a way of valuing actions into which proper upbringing has habituated one."³¹ The content of the universal is thus embodied in the ways of perceiving, deliberating and acting - a "conception of how to live"³² - that comes to light throughout the lifetime of the virtuous person.

If we take the exercise of virtue characteristic of the *phronimos* to rest upon this capacity of perception (or 'situational appreciation', as Wiggins has rendered Aristotle's *aisthesis*) regarding the salient ethical considerations of particular circumstances in which one finds oneself faced with ethical choice, the place of habituation within Aristotle's account becomes very important. If we were to rest content with the deductive 'rule-case' model, we would have been able to understand habituation as the process by which ethical agents acquire the motivational propensities needed to translate the independently grasped blueprint of 'what well-being is' into habitual virtuous action. But this view would no longer seem to be available. For we can now only grant that those who have been properly habituated into correctly perceiving the 'fine and noble', and are motivated to act for the sake of it, can be thought to have access to the universal end. This would seem to make

sense of the statements we find in book ten of the *Ethics*, where Aristotle insists that only the well brought up are able properly to understand the sort of ethical reflection that his work represents.³³

There is, admittedly, a certain circularity involved here, with *phronesis* being the kind of knowledge that can only be acquired by experience and habituation of character, and the good actions that comprise this experience requiring the possession of *phronesis* for their performance. In light of this, it is important to understand that *phronesis* is not something that is merely added on top of a well-formed character, but is a kind of knowledge that forms part of what it is to be of good character. Ethical virtue and practical wisdom therefore develop in an inextricably linked fashion. An account which emphasises the place of moral upbringing in Aristotle's theory would also serve to undermine those views claiming that his conception of the virtues that comprise *eudaimonia* is derived from extra-ethical commitments - something Alasdair MacIntyre refers to as his 'metaphysical biology'.³⁴ Instead of this, we must rest content (on this account) with the idea that Aristotle did not seek to provide any sort of external foundation or justification of his view, but actually took it for granted that his audience had already been brought to share his general ethical perspective.³⁵ As he states in the towards the end of his *Eudemian Ethics*,

... argument and teaching, we may suspect, are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like earth which is to nourish the seed. For he who lives as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does... The character, then, must somehow be there already with a kinship to excellence, loving what is noble and hating what is base.³⁶

There is evidently much of interest in this notion of habituation, especially as regards the conceptual reordering of moral education, about which I have not yet made mention. In fact, one may argue that Aristotle's understanding of virtue was very largely an understanding of its acquisition. Not only do the details of what sort of developmental model Aristotle envisaged need to be fleshed out, but I should also refer to understandable

concerns regarding the apparently ‘mechanical’ nature of this process. I intend, however, to defer this discussion for the moment and look instead to investigate in some further depth this notion of ‘moral perception’ to which I have alluded.

In my previous discussions of the deficiencies of a principle-based ethical system, I have laid particular emphasis upon the way in which such a system underestimates the important role played by judgement - the capacity to fit a moral aim to particular circumstances. One of the advantages of a broadly Aristotelian way of conceiving of moral excellence is that this situational capacity is allowed to play a much fuller role than it is in those accounts of morality influenced by theorising in the Kantian tradition. Moreover, in this last section I have tried to show how Aristotle’s ethical outlook (augmented by some recent interpretations) is of help to us in broadening our view of what moral excellence requires beyond the exercise of good deliberative judgement (*euboulia*) to include a capacity for something like ‘moral perception’ - an ‘eye’ for what he called ‘ultimate particulars’ (*eschata*) in ethics. This is to be understood as the faculty ³⁷ which allows us to discern the features of particular concrete situations that are of most importance for any subsequent deliberative judgement.³⁸ The deductivist paradigm of moral thought, as we have seen, suggests that once one is aware of the ‘major premises’ of practical syllogisms (such as ‘one should not punish the innocent’), the corresponding ‘minor premises’ (such as ‘this accused man is innocent’) require no epistemologically particular means for their discovery. The central ethical virtue for this approach is therefore the strength of the will which protects the properly judged result of the practical syllogism. For Aristotle, however, this protection of *boulesis* does not exhaust all that he means by *phronesis*. Equally important is the operation of *phronesis-nous* - that which allows for the fullest *aisthetic* perception of the particulars constituting the minor premises. Without this, our ethical understanding would be importantly incomplete. This is a point well emphasised by Nancy Sherman;

... most procedures for generating or testing *via* principles leave out of the account the process by which we formulate the intentions to be tested. And this process depends upon what we perceive as relevant in the case, how we individuate or describe the situation. If we misdescribe circumstances or fail to notice relevant features then the test will be testing intentions, but intentions that are inadequately responsive to what may in fact be the demands of the situation ... And reflection which begins with the decision or intention rather than with the construal of the situation to which the intention is a response begins too far down the line.³⁹

Good character is thus revealed not only in acting consistently for good ends, or judging accurately what course of action a commitment to such an end requires, but also in the way one 'reads' the situation in which deliberation and action will be necessary. The *phronimos* is, to use Nussbaum's paraphrase of Henry James, 'finely aware and richly responsible' - cognizant of the multifarious moral considerations that pertain to various particular situations and accepting of the responsibilities such an awareness brings with it. It is of little use having the conscientiousness and willpower such that one is committed to fighting, say, the evils of racism, if one is ill-equipped to appreciate when instances of this kind of discrimination actually occur *in concreto*. These instances are often subtle without reducing their unjust impact, and complex without being imperceptible. What is required of a just person is consequently at least partly comprised of the perceptual power produced by the developed nature of those faculties (both cognitive and affective as we shall see) which assist the recognition of racism and the suffering it produces when it is occurrent. Only if the perception is true to the situation can an action performed out of opposition to racism be characteristic of a virtuous person, rather than merely being the action that a virtuous person would have performed. This represents the acquisition of a kind of knowledge for which there is no available formula or set of formulae, no 'way of perceiving' other than that embodied in the character of practically wise men - those for whom "experience has given them an eye, they see aright."⁴⁰ Joseph Dunne has offered some further examples of moral perceptions that may be of a kind characteristic of the operation of *phronesis*:

I am taking out my frustrations with the boss on the children.

I am making distractions for myself in order to avoid making this decision.

Mary is embarrassed because alcoholism has been mentioned.

An inordinate fear of failure is preventing John from revealing his full potential in class.

James is causing trouble in class because he's bored with work that's too undemanding for him.⁴¹

It is important to note that these perceptions cannot be characterised as distinctively 'moral' from any external or neutral perspective, abstracted from the moral point of view represented by the agent or perceiver in question. As I have suggested before, all that correct moral perceptions, choices or actions can be said to have in common is that they are correct - and this is not a feature which can be appreciated by someone who does not have the capacity to perceive in this way. This represents a departure from those neo-Kantian views (such as Kohlberg's) which have hoped to discover some intrinsic aspect to the *form* of proper moral judgements which marks them out as distinct. As is well known, Kant drew this distinction by separating categorical from hypothetical imperatives, where the first involves a degree of rationally compelled duty (as opposed to action performed out of inclination) that is particular to moral reasons. Aristotle's thought differs from both that of Kant and that of the Stoics (the most prominent Greek thought after Aristotle), in that it does not lay emphasis upon any formal distinction (or indeed any distinction at all) between moral and non-moral reasoning. Rather, all right choices (whether they reveal virtues such as courage, or those such as magnificence, which no longer strike us as especially moral dispositions) are united under the single end of *eudaimonia* and are performed for the sake of the noble (*to kalon*).

Perhaps this discussion remains a little too abstract, lacking a more precise elaboration of the operations of this 'moral perception'. This is true, but is also in some ways appropriate to the matter of concern itself. Indeed, Aristotle himself refrained from providing any examples of quite what it is that is perceived. For it is one of the implications of a focus

upon moral perception and situational judgement , that the centrality of illustrative or schematic examples to philosophical discussion appears to be somewhat unwarranted. The use of such examples too often seems attached to the idea that one can draw moral conclusions (or the matters for deliberation) from a comparatively short discussion of a particular case. Its precise features are taken to be 'symptomatic' of general features that pertain to like cases (which become the main focus of concern), rather than aspects of the situation which demand close consideration in their own terms. This would represent a way of approaching ethical reflection far removed from the one which I have been outlining in this chapter - one whose natural imaginative vehicle would seem to be the more finely grained narrative accounts of ethical choice contained in the novel and biographies.

One should not, however, make too much of the possible aesthetic resonances supplied by the use of terms such as 'perception', 'discernment', and 'the reading of situations'.⁴² It is true that in many ways these analogies can be of help. To return to an example from the last chapter, the process of developing artistic judgement concerning music consists in the gradual refinement of responses to that particular medium. To an uneducated ear, one piece of music may sound pretty much the same as another - maybe we are able to say little more than that we just 'like music'. As we listen attentively to further pieces, and particular features of them are pointed out to us by someone with more experience of music⁴³, we begin to appreciate more and more complexities of which we were previously unaware. Our increased discernment may lead us to better understand quite why we like the music we do, or to prefer alternative pieces to those which we initially favoured. Through a process of education, therefore, we have gained the capacity to discern finer and more complex aspects of music, and to judge them in a superior manner - a capacity which importantly outstrips any attempts we may make to codify it in terms of principles or rules. In his *Politics*, Aristotle himself refers to the analogy between the processes of musical and moral habituation,

... since music happens to be a kind of pleasure, and virtue is concerned with proper enjoyment and loving and hating rightly, it is clear that there is nothing more necessary to learn and to become habituated in than judging rightly and delighting in good characters and fine actions. Rhythm and melody provide keen likenesses of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance and of all the opposites of these and of all the other states of character... And becoming habituated to feeling pain and delight in likenesses is close to feeling the same way towards the things that are their models.⁴⁴

This serves to illustrate the important place that aesthetic forms generally, and music in particular, occupies in Aristotle's thoughts concerning moral development and education, and there is much here that evidently confirms some of the things I have been trying to suggest about these matters. It also reflects the way in which the ancient Greeks tended to see the good of the beautiful, and of the moral sense of the noble as inseparable - in fact both are referred to by the same Greek word (*kalos*). In modern times, however, we are more used to the idea that there may be some opposition between the values of art and morality - that art may exist 'for art's sake' rather than for any (especially moral) end external to it. Indeed, in MacIntyre's condemnation of modern 'emotivist culture' in his *After Virtue*, he refers to one of the defining 'characters' of modernity as being the *aesthete* - one whose appreciate excellences as turned to manipulative rather than moral ends.⁴⁵ I do not intend to explore these complex and interesting issues of the relationship of morality and aesthetics here, but I would stress that one should never overestimate the intimacy of this relationship to the degree that one might begin to understand the development of a finer and more complex sensibility as the sole aim of moral education. We intend to produce agents of good character not moral *dilettantes*. Good character often requires fine perceptions, but we should not want their desirability to result in a situation where an agent is so overwhelmed by complex and competing moral considerations that she is unable to move herself even when action is urgently demanded.

If we do not want to have to defend the difficult view that all moral goods are aesthetically good, we must allow that moral perception includes the ability to know when its task is

complete, or when further perceptual strivings would be fruitless or in danger of fostering inertia, and that it is now the time for action. It may be true to say that fine perception is something praiseworthy irrespective of whether or not any action results from it, but we should not allow the activities of perception, judgement, and action to float too far apart.⁴⁶ If, to adapt an example of Justin Oakley's, we were to imagine a woman hearing of a misfortune that had occurred for an ex-husband of whom she has a dislike, it might be that even though her perceptions of his likely hurt and anger could be finer than those of anyone else, they merely enable her to all the more enjoy *schadenfreude* from his fate and act in ways to maximise its ill consequences.⁴⁷ In recognition of such possibilities, we must remember that it is the task of *phronesis* not merely singularly to develop these various aspects of our moral characters, but also to assist their integration into a virtuous whole. A state in which they exist disharmoniously cannot by definition be one of virtue. A similar warning about the dangers involved in overstressing the connections between art and morality is offered by Joseph Dunne who insists that "there are emotions which we should certainly not regard as good were we to meet them in a friend (or in ourselves) but which we might nonetheless find powerfully expressed in what we should be compelled to regard as a good work of art."⁴⁸

Another way in which our understanding of the picture of *phronesis* I have developed here may go astray is if it is too closely assimilated to the model of ethical *intuitionism*. This view, which became popular in the first few decades of this century (especially through the work of Moore, Pritchard and Ross), accepted the cognitivist thesis that moral values are not created by us but discovered - that truth and falsity properly pertain to notions such as good and wrong. In addition to this they characteristically held either one or both of the following further theses: the ontological claim that 'good' (and other such valuational predicates) made propositional reference to distinct, non-natural and unanalyzable 'properties' in the world, and/or the epistemological claim that there was a particular mode

of cognition or 'intuition' by means of which we could acquire ethical knowledge (whether that meant becoming aware of such 'ethical properties' or not).⁴⁹ The neo-Aristotelian perceptual model I have been outlining here accepts the idea that our beliefs are judged in accordance with their accuracy as a response to ethical reality (the first thesis), and that we can be morally praised for our success in discerning such reality. It is for this reason that some may be tempted to claim that such a model can represent little but a contemporary revival of discredited intuitionist ideas.

However, this would be to ignore the importance of the way in which the perceptual model firmly rejects the other two claims of intuitionism I have stated above. Firstly, it does not seek to posit the existence of any such properties as 'goodness' or 'rightness' (whether defined in Moorean terms or not), existing independently of the make-up of one's sensibility, which one may succeed or fail in identifying.⁵⁰ The ethical 'reality' to which it makes reference does not, therefore, have quite the same degree of metaphysical ambition as was evident in certain intuitionist ideas. Although moral perception is most definitely a matter of cognition (amongst other things), it need not follow that what is involved can be captured by the idea of coming to believe a certain proposition (such as 'that action possesses the simple, unanalyzable property of goodness'). The 'way of perceiving' embodied in the character and conduct of the virtuous person is not easily reducible in terms of the propositional content of his or her beliefs. For what is perceived is essentially practical - the salience or non-salience of a variety of reasons for action present in the situation. And it is precisely such practical reasonings (the content of *phronesis*) which, for an Aristotelian, cannot properly be captured in propositional terms.⁵¹

What are identified by the virtuous person's correct moral perception are not any 'queer' or unusual properties but ordinary reasons and considerations (such as those offered by Dunne above) that bear upon our choice of action in specific situations. Furthermore, in denial of the second claim of the intuitionists, such perception does not involve the possession or

cultivation of any unusual or distinct modes of cognition (over and above sense perception, emotion and reason) suited to matters of ethical importance. Perception of ethical reality is nothing stranger than what is involved in, for instance, taking the presence of a child on a dangerous edge of a cliff as a most salient reason for action. As Dancy has written,

... moral reasons are just ordinary considerations such as his distress or the loss to her self-respect. The wrongness of the action is not a reason for not doing it; reasons for not doing it are more mundane features. This is in keeping with the claim that telling someone, even with authority, that the action is wrong does not give her a reason to hold back. The reason to hold back is the same as the reason why the action is wrong, namely the damage you will do to your friend's prospects (or whatever).⁵²

Of course, correctly judging the respective practical salience of various features of a situation is often a rather more complex affair than that involved in instances such as the dangerous presence of a child upon a precipice. As David Wiggins has stressed, "few situations come already inscribed with the names of all the concerns which they touch or impinge upon."⁵³ This being so, the *phronetic* agent will possess an attentiveness and sensitivity (both cognitive and affective) that marks him or her out as being excellent in this sphere. Such moral capacities are not esoteric in any sense, but are such that any ordinary human being may reasonably aspire to excellence in terms of them. They cannot be taught or learnt from any rule-book, but are developed through a lifetime's experience of active involvement in social practices⁵⁴ (although there is equally no reason why such experience might not prove similarly efficacious in fostering vice).

One of the main features which sets apart the approach I am describing from earlier theories such as intuitionism is its rejection of a Humean bifurcation of beliefs and desires. Only if we reject the view that the recognition of ethical truth cannot be sufficient to motivate action, but requires the independent addition of a distinct desire element, do we become able to see some internal relationship holding between moral judgement and action whilst preserving the idea that such attitudes can be true or false. Intuitionists, accepting the

Humean thesis, conceded that the moral facts of which we could become aware represented mere reports of reality and, as such, were insufficient to motivate action. Many critics have subsequently felt that the way in which this externalism misses something of the essential action-guiding nature of moral judgements (the strangeness we would find exhibited in someone who said that they knew their actions were wrong but did not care to cease performing them), is one of the main explanations for why intuitionism was historically superseded by those non-cognitivist accounts which were thought better able to encompass our ordinary thoughts on this question.⁵⁵

The cognitivist account I am defending here does not posit the existence of neutrally characterisable inert features of the moral world (whether or not this is conceived in naturalistic terms), but claims that those in possession of a suitably developed sensibility are able to judge which of the irreducibly practical reasons for action are most salient within a situation, and furthermore, that ‘seeing’ such features can involve being motivated by them. As an example, we might say that somebody who saw the aforementioned child upon a dangerous cliff but did not judge that this situation presented a reason for action sufficient to motivate him or her, did not merely lack a benevolent desire to match their accurate cognition of the danger involved, but actually failed to ‘see’ something present in the situation - namely the *needfulness* produced by the danger.⁵⁶ And the recognition of this is not possible for someone whose sensibility is not so attuned as to be motivated to act in response to it. This failure represents a cognitive lack - a failure of the developed moral perception (or attention, insight, vision, or whatever) that is required in a fully virtuous character, as well as an affective deficiency.⁵⁷ An awareness of this needfulness and the accompanying motivation to intervene that is united in a person with the appropriately shaped sensibility is not something that, as I have said before, can be explicated in terms of propositions concerning the situation in which it is operational. It is the development of all

aspects of this sensibility in young people, the kind of character preconditional for access to the moral world, that is the task of moral education.

How might we understand the way in which a virtuous person is properly attentive to a situation if their reasoning, as a practical matter, is not to be fully articulated in terms of the propositional content of their beliefs? Equally, what is it that occurs when one's sensibility develops to the extent that one arrives at a correct view of a situation if it is not a change in such beliefs? We might think about these questions with regard to the issue of *akrasia* (incontinence or weakness of will), which Aristotle discussed in the seventh book of his *Ethics*. The *akrates* is a person who has a knowledge of the right course of action which would appear to be the same as that possessed by the virtuous person, yet fails to act in a virtuous manner. If the propositional content of their beliefs is the same, what can explain this failure? As is well known, Socrates thought that the notion of *akrasia* was unintelligible. Believing that virtue represented a theoretical knowledge of the good, he maintained that it was impossible for someone truly to know what action it is good to perform but still not perform it - wrongdoing must always be the result of ignorance. Alternatively, one who takes the problem to be a real one might maintain that an *akratic* person has their knowledge of the good overridden by appetites or emotions which knock reason off its true course. The essential characteristic of the virtuous person, therefore, is the suppression of these aspects of character.

Aristotle's view differed from both of these alternatives. He suggested, against Socrates, that it is certainly possible to act wrongly despite possessing knowledge of what action would be right, and suggests that the answer to the problem of *akrasia* has to do with the role in moral deliberation of appetites and emotions. He did not, however, go so far as to claim that it is the failure to *eliminate* the affective sphere in general that supplies this answer. For Aristotle, appetitive and emotional desires were not things which necessarily need to be suppressed in this way, but were in fact essential ingredients of virtuous

perception, deliberation and conduct. One fails to be continent, not because one has feelings, but because these feelings are not in their proper order or shape - they do not 'speak with the same voice' as their rational prescription. With regard to temperance (*sophrosune*), which Aristotle regarded as the only unqualified domain of *akrasia*, the incontinent man (as opposed to the self-indulgent *akolastos*) actually chooses not to have that one extra drink. The fact that his action does not follow in accordance with his choice (*prohairesis*) has to do with his being overtaken by the impulses of appetite. He possesses the required knowledge, but fails to use it. In the case of the continent person (the self-controlled *enkrates*), these competing impulses are overridden by the motivational force of the 'reasoned wanting' expressed in choice, whilst for the truly temperate no improper or excessive feelings are present at all. Similarly, for that other noted virtue of self-control, courage, excellence consists in fearlessness when one engages in dangerous action for the sake of noble ends. The consequence of the proper upbringing of the virtuous person is that the rational and non-rational parts of their souls (as Aristotle phrased his moral psychology) operate in tandem to the extent that immature competing desires exist for them no longer. Their desiderative capacities (*orektikon*), whether they concern appetites, emotions or 'reasoned wantings', are able to and have listened to reason in the manner that marks out their chief distinction from the merely physiological aspects of their non-rational parts, and which represents a successful moral education.

Why, one might ask, does the moral belief that is shared by the virtuous and the incontinent motivate only in the case of the former? To avoid the Humean conclusion that there must be an extra non-cognitive desiderative element missing in the case of the latter person to explain their failure, McDowell has claimed that we may interpret Aristotle's account as meaning that that the *akrates* has their accurate perception somehow "clouded, or unfocused, by a desire to do otherwise".⁵⁸ He sees the same features of the situation (those potentially constituting the minor premise which, if joined with the major premise he

already possesses in a practical syllogism, would result in virtuous action), but does not see them in a way that motivates. It is not that virtuous reasons lose out during deliberation to contrary desires, for deliberation is already complete and a choice has been made. Yet this choice does not result in appropriate action. This means that we remain able to identify virtue with, as McDowell puts it, the 'deliverances of sensitivity' - a sensitivity which is sufficient to present us with the most virtuous reasons (and only those reasons) for action in any particular situation, and to ensure that the very presence of those reasons is enough to motivate us to act in accordance with them. We might understand this 'clouding' of perception by desire as the kind of thing that happens when we have a specific intention to refuse the extra drink, but find ourselves slowly falling for its temptations - that extra drink becomes 'just' that extra drink. We do not alter our temperate choice, but the extent to which it is integrated with our impulses begins to subside. Eventually, our relation to our original choice becomes like that of an actor to the lines he is reciting, and our action comes to reflect an earlier stage of moral development when we were unable sufficiently to control our appetites.⁵⁹

In comparing the *akratic* to the drunk or the madman, Aristotle suggests that in extreme cases we possess knowledge of the good in the way they do - at the 'back of the mind', unobtainable for practical purposes because of their submission to appetite. Moral education acts against this possibility by encouraging the pleasure that is taken in acting for the sake of the noble, and thus counteracting the competing desires for the pleasures resulting from the sating of the appetites. In other cases, we might understand the problematic relation of perception to motivation in a slightly different way - this time concerning *deficiencies* of feeling. Here, the clouding results from a failure to see a moral situation in its fullest sense - a perspective that may well involve some more intense affective response to an object more distant to us than our immediate and immature appetites and impulses. To return to a previous example, we may choose a course of action

on the basis of a perceived needfulness, but do we really see it in its fullest, unclouded sense if we feel no accompanying sympathy? As Nancy Sherman has concluded: "The source of the problem may not be an overly strong rival desire, but simply a phlegmatic response to the situation... the solution is not to quiet the passions... but to appeal to them, to be aroused by their sensitivity, to see with the heart."⁶⁰ Once again, the cognitive differences between a person who was motivated to act and another who was not should not be considered entirely in terms of their propositional content. Rather, they are to be thought of as differences in appreciative sensibility - that which accounts for the received 'shape' or 'pattern' of propositionally identical cognitive states.⁶¹

Whilst these examples of the ways in which incontinence exhibits itself are unproblematic, some have felt that McDowell's interpretation carries with it certain difficulties. If, as he suggests, there is a kind of knowledge which can always ensure it is acted upon due to its 'silencing' of non-virtuous reasons for action, and which is the preserve of the virtuous person, it becomes hard to understand quite what is involved in the case of continence. If *akrasia* results from the clouding of the accurate perception enjoyed by the virtuous person, how is it that the continent person (who, it would seem, has neither accurate nor clouded perception) manages to act upon his choice? Can it be that their cognition is just as inadequate as the incontinent, but that they enjoy a more intense desire to do what is good (or conversely, less intense opposing desires? This would seem to mean that the possibility of cognitive motivation (which grounds his internalism), applies only for the perfectly virtuous. For the rest of us on McDowell's account, the motivation will only be Humean.⁶² As well as severely narrowing the field of cognitive motivation, his account also seems, according to Sarah Broadie, to misrepresent Aristotle. For not only does he never equate *continence* with ignorance (only *incontinence* is so identified), but he also explicitly defends the idea that *akrasia* can occur at times of clearheadedness.⁶³ She concludes from this that Aristotle nowhere suggests that there is a kind of practical knowledge of this sort that

necessarily gives rise to proper action. His usage of ‘ignorance’ is therefore meant merely as a label for incontinent behaviour, rather than as a postulate to explain it.⁶⁴ It refers not to the character of the knowledge, but to the sense in which the knowledge shared by the virtuous, the continent, and the incontinent, remains unfulfilled if it does not achieve its actualisation in a course of action. This caveat that the sensibility of a person with developed moral perception cannot *guarantee* virtuous action does not, however, threaten the notion (which I have canvassed throughout this chapter) that cognitions *can* entail motivation. It merely casts doubt upon the idea that if a cognitive state is sufficient to motivate in one instance, it must also motivate whenever else it occurs.⁶⁵

Although the extra complexity of these interpretative questions need not detain us here, the issue of incontinence gives us some insight into the distinctively Aristotelian manner of conceiving the place of feelings and emotions in moral thought. Whichever way we understand Aristotle’s intentions regarding this issue, it is of no doubt that he sees the proper relative standing of the cognitive, affective and conative aspects of moral character as the key to avoiding incontinence (and indeed achieving full virtue). In addition to excellence of the rational part of the soul (this being practical wisdom in the domain of *praxis*) which I have considered in some depth, Aristotle understood the basis of virtue as being the proper habituation of the non-rational part - the acquisition of states of the sort in “which we are well or ill disposed in respect of the feelings concerned”.⁶⁶ This, in more modern parlance, we may like to term the ‘education of the emotions’.⁶⁷ Although I have made some preliminary reference to the role taken by affect in virtuous perception and judgement, I shall in the next chapter give some more sustained consideration to the way in which a neo-Aristotelian account of moral education will understand the nature of these emotions. For without the correct development of the affective part of character, the achievement of practical wisdom will remain an impossibility - we would remain unable to ‘see with the heart’.

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- ¹ I am writing of 'belief' here in the propositional and non-emotional sense in which it appears in the work of most neo-Kantian writers on moral education. As we shall see later in this chapter, if our understanding of cognition were to be stripped of these kinds of limitations, the claims of this paragraph may seem less appropriate.
- ² This is the assumption termed 'centralism' by Susan Hurley in her *Natural Reasons op. cit.* The terminology of 'thick' and 'thin' moral concepts is used in Bernard Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy op. cit.* pp. 143-5.
- ³ Kupperman J *Character* (1991, Oxford, Oxford University Press) p. 173.
- ⁴ In articulating the claim that action-based ethical thought lacks a motivational component, Louis Pojman writes that: 'Ethics becomes a sort of mental plumbing, moral casuistry, a set of hair-splitting distinctions that somehow loses track of the purpose of morality altogether. But what good are such rules without the dynamo of character that propels the rules to action?' Pojman, L *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (1995, Belmont CA, Wadsworth) p. 162.
- ⁵ Pincoffs, E *op. cit.* p. 150.
- ⁶ The aforementioned work of these two writers has formed only a part of the revival of interest in Aristotle and 'virtue ethics' that has emerged in the last couple of decades. One might also draw attention to the work of Edmund Pincoffs, Alasdair MacIntyre (also aforementioned) and Philippa Foot (esp. her collection *Virtues and Vices* (1978, Oxford, Oxford University Press). Other important works include: Geach, P *The Virtues* (1977, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); Wallace, J *Virtues and Vices* (1978, Ithaca, Cornell University Press); Dent, N *The Moral Psychology of the Virtues* (1984, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); Nussbaum, M *Love's Knowledge op. cit.* and *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); and Sherman, N *The Fabric of Character* (1989, Oxford, Clarendon Press).
- ⁷ *Nichomachean Ethics* trans. By Thomson, J.A.K. (1952, London, Penguin) 1097b37-1098a2.
- ⁸ *Ibid.* 1105a27-28.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* 1105a30-4.
- ¹⁰ The possession of a virtuous set of motivational propensities represents a correct rational shaping of the desiderative capacities (*orektikon*) with which a person is naturally imbued. These are various in type. They range from sensory appetites (control of which is the virtue of temperance), emotional feelings such as fear (the overcoming of which in pursuit of the noble represents courage) to *boulesis* or 'reasoned wantings' - where motivation simply derives from one's practically wise judgement of value.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* 1105a35.
- ¹² Expanding a point of Aristotle's, Gilbert Ryle has amplified this distinction by pointing out how we would not accept as an excuse for immoral behaviour the claim that the agent had simply 'forgotten the difference between right and wrong'. Forgetfulness would, however, appear to be a valid excuse in the case of theoretical knowledge or skills. Ryle, G 'On Forgetting the Difference Between Right and Wrong' in Melden A.I. (ed.) *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (1958, Washington, University of Washington Press) pp. 147-159. Cp. Aristotle *op. cit.* 1140 b27-30.
- ¹³ Broadie, S *Ethics with Aristotle* (1991, Oxford, Oxford University Press) p. 81.
- ¹⁴ Foot, P 'Virtues and Vices' in Crisp, R and Slote, M (eds.) *Virtue Ethics* (1997, Oxford, Oxford University Press) p. 171.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 172.
- ¹⁶ The unity of the virtues thesis has been one of the more famously controversial aspects of Aristotelian doctrine. In a way, it would seem to be a necessary corollary of any virtue theory, as we can easily understand the need for virtues to be 'bounded' by other virtues. This is to say that an activity which we would, *ceteris parabis*, regard as virtuous, may not be if it issues in a vice related to a different virtue. It appears, however, that many, if not most, modern commentators are concerned to reject the thesis in its full-blown form, finding the idea that a wicked person (a Nazi for instance) could properly possess the virtue of courage to be rather less than bizarre. This idea is certainly present in the views of, amongst others, Stuart Hampshire and Alasdair MacIntyre. I am tempted to say that this reluctance results from an untoward stress upon Aristotle's account of the various virtues, as opposed to his general understanding of *eudaimonia* within which they are situated. In the reading of Aristotle I propose, following Wiggins and McDowell, the importance of ethical upbringing or habituation serves to make such a stress upon a foundational list of the components of well-being less appropriate.

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- 17 We should note that Aristotle is concerned to stress that the possession of good judgement is not sufficient for *phronesis*. This virtue has the additional requirement that good judgements are properly translated into practice.
- 18 *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1112b11-16.
- 19 *Ibid.* 1112b37-8.
- 20 This is particularly so when deliberation is aimed at the achievement of general rather than particular ends - 'the good for man' rather than honesty, courage etc. Cf. *ibid.* 1140a25-29, 1142b27-3.
- 21 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* trans. by Ross, WD (1915, Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- 22 Jaeger's influential work makes a different use of this understanding. He claimed that it is the function of *phronesis* is 'to discover the right means of attaining the end determined by the moral will' Jaeger, W *Aristotle: Fundamentals of his Development* trans. by Robinson, R (1934, Oxford, Clarendon Press) p. 242.
- 23 Broadie, S *op. cit.* pp. 179-265. McDowell, J 'Deliberation and Moral Development' in Engstrom, S and Whiting, J (eds.) *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics* (1996, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) pp. 19-35.
- 24 J.A.K. Thompson is among those translators favouring this latter version. *op. cit.*
- 25 This interpretation is perhaps most famously offered by D.J. Allan in his 'Aristotle's Account of the Origin of Moral Principles' in *Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of Philosophy* vol. 12 (1953, Amsterdam, North Holland) pp. 120-7. He similarly maintains elsewhere that: 'In some contexts actions are subsumed under general rules, and performed or avoided accordingly ... in other contexts it is said to be a distinctive feature of practical syllogisms that they start from the announcement of an end ... A particular action is then performed because it is a means or the first link in a chain of means linking to the end' 'The Practical Syllogism' in *Autour d'Aristotle: Recueil offert a Mgr. Mansion* (1955, Louvain) pp. 336-7 as quoted in Wiggins, D 'Deliberation and Practical Reason' in his *Needs, Values, Truth op. cit.* p. 226.
- 26 Given its neo-Kantian 'shape', it is perhaps surprising that one of the most prominent presentations of such a picture is provided by that arch anti-Kantian Alasdair MacIntyre, in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality? op. cit.* pp. 129-142. Terence Irwin's *Aristotle's First Principles* (1988, Oxford, Clarendon) and John Cooper's *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (1975, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press) also lend support to this interpretation.
- 27 *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1104a3-10.
- 28 *Ibid.* 1109b15-23. Martha Nussbaum has notably rendered *krisis* here (in the final clause) as 'discernment' rather than the commonly found 'decision'. This would seem to allow that such an operation can be a character revealing matter for which one is morally responsible, independently of its consequences for action. This translation is emphasised in her 'The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Public and Private Rationality' in *Love's Knowledge op. cit.*
- 29 He makes this claim in 'Universal Prescriptivism' in Singer, P (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (1991, Oxford, Blackwell) p. 461.
- 30 Wiggins, D 'Deliberation and Practical Reason' *op. cit.*, McDowell 'Deliberation and Moral Development' *op. cit.* See also Vasilou, I 'The Role of Good Upbringing in Aristotle's Ethics' *Metaphilosophy* 1998 pp. 771-797 for an account heavily influenced by these works.
- 31 McDowell *ibid.* p. 23.
- 32 McDowell 'Virtue and Reason' *op. cit.* p. 346.
- 33 *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1094b28-1095a6, 1095b3-8.
- 34 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 162, Williams, B *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy op. cit.* p. 44.
- 35 McDowell claims that: 'It is undeniable that, to many modern readers, there seems to be a question of correctness that such an approach cannot address, precisely because the approach does not seek a foundation for the outlook as a whole. But I think the very idea of such a question reflects a kind of anxiety that is distinctively modern.' 'Deliberation and Moral Development' *op. cit.* p. 30. The motivating thought behind this anxiety, furthered by an attachment to the superiority of the methods characteristic of the natural sciences, is that "... objective correctness would require breaking out of a sphere of specific cultural inheritance into an undistorted contact with the real" McDowell, J 'Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics' in *Aristotle and Moral Realism* Heinaman, R (ed.) (1995, London, UCL Press) p. 216.
- 36 Aristotle 'The Eudemian Ethics' trans. by Barnes, J 1179a35-1179b31 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (1984, Princeton N.J., University of Princeton Press).

- 37 Lawrence Blum stresses that we may be better thinking of a collection of abilities (both cognitive and affective) here, rather than referring to a unitary 'faculty', although this claim does not arise from a reading of Aristotle. *op. cit.* p. 46 n. 25.
- 38 There is a need to be careful here, as it would be wrong to exaggerate both the separateness and the practical chronology of these components of moral thought. Some recent works sympathetic to the idea of 'moral perception' (notably Lawrence Blum's *Moral Perception and Particularity op. cit.*) give the impression that it is a kind of pre-ethical faculty, that enables the entry of moral concepts at a subsequent stage of judgement. In his analytical breakdown of the 'steps of moral agency' (*Ibid.* pp. 57-60), for instance, Blum claims that a stage of perception precedes a stage of judgement. Although we may grant that such stages are conceptually separable and logically ordered, it is wrong to overlook the extent to which they enjoy a dynamic and often coincidental relationship. Any perception may of course be proved inadequate by the experience of deliberative reflection or of attempts to act. In such situations, it is clear that some kind of 'to and fro' mutual correction will occur to disrupt any conception of the relationship as necessarily uni-linear. The further possibility of coincidence occurs when motivation derives merely from perception, and there is no need for subsequent judgements. In Aristotle's words, 'the action proceeds more directly from the moral state' (*Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1117a20). Perhaps more problematic is Blum's suggestion that moral perception can be analyzed as being composed of two distinct steps. These are; a) the accurate recognition of an inchoate situation's features; and then, b) recognizing 'the features of an already characterised situation as morally significant' (*Ibid.* p. 58). This would seem to give the impression that perception is engaged *before* one's judgement becomes coloured by ethical concerns. But surely certain so-called 'thick' concepts conjoin evaluative and empirical content to the extent that confining one's judgement to already characterised situations is to risk missing some of the picture. Our perceptions possess an ethical quality from their very beginnings, and we are responsible for those parts of the picture we miss.
- 39 *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1147a25-26; Sherman, N *The Fabric Of Character* (1989, Oxford, Oxford University Press) pp. 25-26.
- 40 This is David Wiggins' paraphrase of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1143b15, offered in his *Needs, Values, Truth op. cit.* p. 236. Barbara Herman's claim that the discernment of moral saliences can be encompassed by Kant's theory of judgement at least acknowledges this important phenomenon, but still understands it as an ability that is acquired and exercised *via* reference to rules. Cf. her 'The Practice of Moral Judgement' in *Journal of Philosophy* 82 1985 pp. 414-436.
- 41 Dunne, J *Back to the Rough Ground: Phronesis and Techne in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle* (1993, Notre Dame IN, University of Notre Dame Press) p. 302.
- 42 Nussbaum has perhaps been most guilty of over-emphasising this particular manner of understanding ethical excellence.
- 43 At the risk of sullyng Aristotle's intentions, one might say that experience has given them an 'ear'. Cp. *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1143b14. Indeed, as Wittgenstein referred to a similar ability to appreciate what is salient in concrete situations as a 'nose' (cited in Dunne, J *op. cit.* p. 368), this perhaps serves to complete the set of sensory analogies.
- 44 Aristotle *The Politics* 1340a15-28 trans. by Sherman, N in *The Fabric of Character op. cit.* pp. 182-3.
- 45 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* pp. 24-25, 40-41.
- 46 Lawrence Blum criticises McDowell's account of moral perception in 'Virtue and Reason', for defining this solely in terms of its generation of right actions. This perhaps unfairly overlooks the fact that McDowell's article is specifically addressed to the task of reversing the non-cognitivist approach to the understanding of right conduct ('from the outside in') with one that approaches from the 'inside out'. The issue of conduct is thus the guiding thread of the piece, and this is perhaps why moral sensitivity or perception is understood only in terms of its relations to it. Blum, L *Moral Perception and Particularity op. cit.* p. 43-44 n.21.
- 47 Oakley, J *Morality and the Emotions* (1992, London, Routledge) p. 208 n. 83.
- 48 Dunne, J *op. cit.* p. 73.
- 49 Both views were held by Moore, whilst Ross and Pritchard accepted only the second.
- 50 And in not so doing, they are immune to Mackie's central criticism of moral cognitivism - that it rests upon the existence of what he termed 'queer' entities. Whilst maintaining that appeals to such entities are a central part of moral language, he insisted that they make reference to things that cannot exist. His is thereby an 'error theory' concerning the nature of moral language. Mackie, J *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong op. cit.*

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- 51 It is this latter claim that marks out the view I am defending here from those Kantian theories which also maintain (*contra* intuitionism) that ethical truths are found in the sphere of practical as opposed to theoretical reason. Thomas Nagel is perhaps the most prominent contemporary representative of these theorists.
- 52 Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* *op. cit.* p. 115.
- 53 Wiggins, D *op. cit.* p. 231.
- 54 Thus allowing 'expertise' to revert to its original meaning as a derivative of the Latin term *expertus* - to have experience of.
- 55 MacIntyre, A *A Short History of Ethics* (1966, London, MacMillan) pp. 254-8 and *After Virtue* *op. cit.* pp. 13-8; Darwall, S Gibbard A and Railton, P 'Toward *Fin de Siecle* Ethics: Some Trends' in *Philosophical Review* 1997 p. 119; Dancy, J 'Intuitionism' in Singer, P *A Companion to Ethics* *op. cit.* p. 415.
- 56 Darwall S, Gibbard A and Railton P *ibid.* p. 156. In combining empirical content and motivational force, 'need' is representative of what have been termed 'thick' ethical concepts (most especially by Bernard Williams in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* *op. cit.* pp. 143-5, and in various writings by John McDowell). They are used in contradistinction to 'thin' concepts such as 'good' and 'right' which do not seem to have this feature.
- 57 It is thus a failure of what Michael Luntley likes to term 'sensible thinking' (in 'Renovating the Political and Autonomous University' in *The University in a Liberal State* Brecher, B *et al* (eds.) (1996, Basingstoke, Avebury Press). This idea draws inspiration from Annette Baier's reinterpretation of Hume, which argues that he had not intended his mature writing to relegate reason to a subsidiary position to that of bare desire (as many have assumed), but was actually attempting to propose a 'more enlarged species of reason' that encompassed the sentiments. She writes that 'The *Treatise* used reflection first to destroy one version of reason, then to establish the sort of customs, habits, abilities and passions that can bear their own moral survey. It thereby reestablished a transformed, active, socialized reason to a 'likeness of rank, not to say equality' with sovereign moral sentiment' *A Progress of Sentiments* *op. cit.*
- 58 McDowell, J 'Virtue and Reason' *op. cit.* p. 336.
- 59 The idea that moral weakness represents (at least in part) a reversion to earlier stages of one's moral development is stressed by Miles Burnyeat in his 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good' in Rorty, AO (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (1980, Berkeley CA, University of California Press) pp. 69-92.
- 60 Sherman, N *The Fabric of Character* *op. cit.* p. 48.
- 61 This suggestion is offered by Jonathan Dancy *op. cit.* pp. 53-4 and by Margaret Little who writes that the "notion of "taking as morally salient" is not reducible to believing or knowing the proposition that a given feature or set of features has such-and-such moral significance. Rather... "taking as salient" is akin to having a kind of experience". 'Virtue as Knowledge: Objections from the Philosophy of Mind' in *Nous* vol. 31 no.1 1997 p. 66.
- 62 Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* *Ibid.*
- 63 *Nicomachean Ethics* *op. cit.* 1149b14-18.
- 64 Broadie, S *op. cit.* p. 299.
- 65 Dancy *Moral Reasons* *op. cit.* pp. 53-54.
- 66 *Nicomachean Ethics*. *op. cit.* 1105b26.
- 67 Although this would not be to suggest, *contra* Aristotle, that virtuous character can be derived simply from teaching. I do not intend 'education' to have these narrow connotations.



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Chapter Four

An Aristotelian Alternative II: The Education of the Emotions

In the previous chapter I introduced an Aristotelian approach to ethics as a promising alternative to the philosophical positions we have seen to underpin much of the moral education theory in the second half of the twentieth century. I also began to indicate the main points of divergence between these ancient and modern forms of thought by means of a discussion of the nature of moral judgement and moral perception. In this discussion it became clear that a further aspect of this divergence concerned the role of the affective dimension within the operation of these practical faculties. This chapter will investigate this topic in the greater depth it deserves, and will move on from this to outline the account of childhood moral development and pedagogy which we may feel able to glean from Aristotle's work. This, it is hoped, will possess distinct advantages over the accounts we have encountered thus far.

The philosophical analysis of human emotions, and feelings more generally, has long been a notoriously difficult and divergent enterprise. This is due in no small part to the very wide range of application which these terms cover in ordinary usage, and the number of component features which are thought to be involved as a matter of conceptual necessity. Perhaps one of the simplest manners of analysing common emotional phenomena such as anger or fear is to focus upon their *affects*. This would be to follow the ordinary sense we have that being in an emotional state involves *feeling* something whereas being in a state of, say, belief need not have these affects on us. Affectivity may of course be understood in terms of either bodily or psychic feelings. Both Descartes and Hume seem to have held the view that emotions are properly understood in terms of feelings of the latter sort, like the anger or joy we may understand ourselves to be experiencing despite the absence of bodily

alteration. Indeed, even if bodily affects were to accompany our psychic feelings, these would simply be associated with, or caused by our emotions rather than actually being part of them.

A difficulty with this view is that it would seem to suggest that emotions are only accessible to introspection, and it therefore precludes the fairly unproblematic idea that we can know the emotional state somebody is in rather better than they can themselves. Indeed, the very psychic feelings with which we may want to identify emotions can be such as to disrupt the ordinary processes of introspection by means of which we identify ourselves as being in this or that emotional state. Problems of this sort led both William James and Carl Lange, writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, independently to propose theories identifying emotions with the bodily disturbances accompanying our perceptions of the external world. Anger is therefore not to be thought of as any sort of feeling 'inside our minds' but as the composite of physical symptoms such as muscular tightening, redness of face, and heavy breathing that result from the perception of an insulting gesture (or some other anger-inducing occurrence). Despite establishing a sense in which emotions could be said to be publicly observable, further difficulties arise from this sole concentration upon *feelings* (things which we actually notice about ourselves) which this physicalist understanding shares with Descartes and Hume.

One such difficulty regards the little sense affective explanations can make of the lasting quality of certain emotions, especially where the experience of them is not continuously tied to certain feelings at all. A good example may be the case of grief, which often seems to affect people without them actually feeling it as such (bodily or psychically). Only at some later stage of their life may the grieving person come to realise the way in which their grief was impacting upon them, but it would be difficult to maintain that it was only at this time that the person really had that emotion. This would suggest that we should not tie the affective quality of emotions too closely to feelings.¹ Indeed, given that many emotions

(consider grief, remorse and regret) seem almost impossible to differentiate purely by means of reference to their affects, even when this is not solely construed in terms of feelings, we may consider the possibility that there may be some additional element central to the analysis of emotion. For many theorists, this missing element is cognition. This would mean that beliefs would not be understood as merely relating to or causing emotions, but as being part of what the emotions are. Although some such as Sartre², and more latterly Robert Solomon³, have argued that emotions are simply certain types of cognition not essentially related to affectivity, this need not mean that affect is removed from the picture entirely. It will instead mean that the perception of the world with which any affects are associated is a key element within the complex whole of the emotion. Different emotions will therefore most often be differentiated in terms of the beliefs about the world with which similar affects are associated. It is only in this way that we may be able to claim that identical feelings of psychic depression and bodily sluggishness are more properly seen as symptomatic of grief rather than remorse or regret because they relate to the knowledge that a loved one has died. At least one result of extending our understanding of emotions in this manner into the cognitive domain, is that we become able to conceive of ways in which our emotions may be educable states, rather than irrational brute forces.

This is certainly the view of the philosopher of education Richard Peters, who gave some sustained attention to the nature and development of the emotions throughout his work and, despite sharing many of his neo-Kantian views, has criticised Kohlberg's model of moral development for the lack of proper attention he thought it granted to its affective aspects.⁴ Peters wrote that "the central feature of states of mind which we call 'emotions'... is a type of cognition that can be called an appraisal".⁵ Emotions therefore reveal the world to us in non-neutral evaluatively coloured ways, and despite having a 'conceptual connection' with affects, are identified with "reference to the understanding of the situations which evokes them".⁶ Importantly for Peters, cognitive appraisal could be of two kinds, active or passive,

depending upon the kind of phenomena they are connected with. Appraisals which are properly deemed 'active' serve to connect our cognitions with action - they motivate us to do things in accordance with the way we see the world. We may, for instance, see an act of punishment descending into cruelty (an evaluative appraisal), and be motivated to intervene (an active state). Peters stressed that in functioning as a motive, such an appraisal cannot form part of what we would want to call an emotion. Instead, emotions exist when appraisals of the world are connected with bodily or psychic phenomena which 'come over us'. In other words, they connect cognitions with passivity.

This strict separation between activity and passivity is indicative of Peters' intellectual debt to Kant. As we have seen before, a Kantian view of morality understands it to be primarily a matter of acting out of duty to moral principles available to us *via* the use of reason. As such, its domain lies on the active side of Peters' distinction. Unlike the passive states which 'come over us', action can truly be said to be under the control of our will, and thus represent something for which we can be held morally responsible. Although he did not dismiss emotions as mere blind forces, he understood the kind of cognition available to us in emotional states to be of a distinctly inferior order. This is because of the tendency emotions have to "warp and cloud perception and judgement and aid and abet self-deception and insincerity".⁷ As a rational enterprise, education must, for Peters, attempt to correct these damaging tendencies and ensure that children are brought up with clear rather than clouded perception.

Emotions are to be educationally disciplined by reason in two main ways. Firstly, the cognitive appraisals upon which emotions are based are to be made subject to the rational criteria which necessarily apply to all beliefs. Children should therefore become able to recognise when the emotions which they or others are experiencing are connected to irrational appraisals, so that they can be suitably revised. This process will involve a developed ability to recognise different kinds of emotion by reference to their distinctive

cognitive and affective features. Rational control is thus exerted by increasing children's knowledge and reflective understanding of the ways in which people such as themselves can characteristically be affected by certain kinds of appraisal.⁸ Yet even those people who have this kind of knowledge and understanding of emotions may not actually be able to control them by force of will. Some emotions are just too 'primitive' and intractable. For this reason, Peters felt, educators must also attempt the "control and canalisation of passivity"⁹, whereby these kinds of state are stabilised into less chaotic sentiments and dispositions, and channeled into positive expressive outlets (such as art) which exist midway between passivity and action.

Problems with Peters' view arise both from his denial of the common sense idea that emotions can function as motives, and from his connected denigration of their ethical importance. Firstly, are emotions really so distinct from motivations and desires? Certainly in ordinary usage, we do not seem to have any particular problem in pointing to an emotional state as being a motive for an action. We strike out at someone because we are angry with them. We resist cheerful public occasions because we are grieving for a loved one.¹⁰ These do not strike us as being unusual kinds of explanation. Equally, one might have difficulty referring to someone as experiencing certain emotions if they do not experience a desire to go along with their bodily and psychic affects. Can it be true that my cognition of an insult together with tense and agitated feelings can fully represent anger, when I cannot really be bothered to act in any way even when the opportunity presents itself? Although I would not want to claim that having a certain sort of desire is a necessary feature of all emotional states, the strict distinction between emotions and motivations that Peters insists upon does seem rather difficult to uphold. Indeed Kant does not appear to have denied that we can be motivated to act by an emotion. He did, however, like Peters, claim that our emotions are partial and unreliable, and thus present unsatisfactory sources of moral motivation compared with affectless operations of practical reason (discernments of

where duties lie), and that being outside of the autonomous control of the will, they cannot possess non-instrumental moral worth.¹¹ Although Kant allowed that certain kinds of emotion may be derivatively useful in promoting our adherence to moral duty (we may think primarily of sympathy), and may therefore be justifiably strengthened in education, they “must not precede a metaphysic of morals or be mixed with it”.¹² There is no additional element required for us to act morally over and above the operations of dispassionate reason. Indeed Kant doubted whether emotional motivation, even when it produces the same actions as a purely rational adherence to duty, could be considered as a form of *moral* motivation at all.

From the brief mention I have made throughout this chapter concerning the place of feeling and emotion within an Aristotelian (or neo-Aristotelian) account of the moral life, it will be clear that this diverges in a number of important ways from the ideas so far considered in this section. Moral virtue, for Aristotle, was a state in which reason and desire are in harmony - the rational and non-rational parts of the soul ‘speaking with the same voice’. Most virtues characteristically exist within some particular area of life and operate with regard to its associated emotions (courage with danger and fear, temperance with bodily pleasures and appetite, and so on), representing an intermediate state (the famous ‘mean’) between experiencing too much and too little of that emotion. To use the example of courage therefore, a person is brave when avoiding the twin vices of recklessness (not acknowledging the presence of actual danger) and cowardice (inability to act for the sake of a noble end due to being overcome by fear) in their choice of action. Similarly, one exhibits modesty in avoiding both vulgarity or shamelessness at one extreme and over-sensitivity or touchiness at the other.¹³ It is not that fear or feelings of self-esteem (or indeed, for Aristotle, any emotion) are in themselves bad, but that they become problematic if one’s moral character or practical wisdom is deficient in a way which leads to an emotion being exhibited inappropriately to the situation.

Of course there is nothing in this view which necessarily departs from the views held by Socrates and the early Plato, according to whom feelings and emotions were necessarily corruptive of the life of reason which resulted in virtue, nor from the essentially similar ideas of Kant or Richard Peters. On all such accounts, 'harmony' would be little different from 'mastery', with intellect firmly in the driving seat. Although Aristotle seems close to this view in stressing that it is the role of the rational part to prescribe to the receptive, non-rational part, one need not understand this in any overly 'intellectualist' manner. For the term 'rational part' was used by Aristotle in different senses. Sometimes it referred narrowly to the pure intellect, which is counterposed to the non-rational collection of functions which are not reason themselves, including both those of mere 'growth and nutrition' and the appetites, impulses and desires which issue in action. However, as these latter, specifically human desiderative faculties (*orektikon*) are "in a sense receptive of reason"¹⁴, Aristotle often included them in a broader and more inclusive understanding of 'the rational' which is sensitive and emotional as well as calculative and theoretical. It is the proper condition and function of these different 'strictly rational' and 'reason responsive' capacities which represents both the subject matter of ethics, and the concern of moral education. The 'harmony' involved in virtue is not, therefore, a triumph of reason over suppressed irrational feeling, but is the unified operation of two broadly rational sources of virtue - intellectual and moral.

What is particular about Aristotle's view, therefore, is that moral virtue is understood as a dynamic and integrated complex of cognition, affect and desire. It reveals itself in the ways we think, feel and are motivated to act. This is shown, for instance, by the account of anger in his *Rhetoric* where he argued that "anger (*orge*) may be defined as a desire accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one's friends."¹⁵ Here we can see that the emotion in question is not just a blind affective feeling, but is directed cognitively and intentionally at a selected

feature of the environment (the conspicuous slight). This cognition does not 'give rise' to the emotion, but forms part of what the emotion is. As much can be said with regard to the desire for revenge which accompanies the belief and painful feeling (this being constitutive rather than consequent). Aristotle's understanding evinced here thus departs from the theories of both James/Lange and Kant/Peters, in that he does not attempt to separate out the cognitive, affective and desiderative components of emotional responses with the intention of identifying one of these components as the core essence which accounts for the others.

On this view, moral responses cannot be evaluated without reference to the emotional state of the agent, as this is a central feature of the character for which they bear responsibility. Emotions are morally *significant*. The virtuous person is one who has the right emotions, of the right intensity, towards the right objects. Such significance, however, does not yet show that emotions can be of any particular *worth*, or that any worth they may have is not merely instrumental to the operation of reason, or that an education of the emotions should properly aim at least as much at their cultivation as at their suppression or 'canalisation'. In other words, I have not yet shown that an Aristotelian view of the emotions regards them any more positively than other competing views which might similarly allow that they can be 'responsive to reason'. Indeed, some philosophers have interpreted Aristotle in way which undermines any hopes we may have of deriving such a view from his account of ethics. Von Wright, for instance, has written that "action in accordance with virtue may be said to be the outcome of a *contest* between 'reason' and 'passion'... In the case of every specific virtue there is some specific passion which the man of virtue has learned to *master*" (emphases my own).¹⁶ In the light of this, how might the proper state of emotion ever be anything other than one of suppression?

A more positive account of the ethical worth of emotions might begin by stressing the contribution they can make in assisting correct moral choice and action. Rather than

thinking of them as necessarily destructive influences upon clear moral thought and action, we might instead see how these difficult tasks are made easier and more consistent when affective responses support the use of reason. How much easier it is to courageously defend a loved one from attack when we are angry with their attacker, or to perform charitable duties when we are filled with pity for the plight of the poor. As I have already said, this is the kind of instrumental value that was granted to the emotions by Kant, and would prove similarly amenable to utilitarians (although Kant would insist that it was the duty that was actually responsible for the motivation).¹⁷ Yet there is still no particular *necessity* for the fully moral person to also be an emotionally sensitive person. Indeed, there is a tendency in Kant's thought in this area to see actions performed with the help of emotional 'crutches' as distinctively inferior to those motivated purely by the recognition of duty. It is only the duty motive which can be summoned by and relied upon by all moral agents, and for which they may be held responsible. Emotions may fortuitously aid action of the kind which duty demands, but it has none of these features and thus cannot be deemed a moral form of motivation. An Aristotelian view differs from this in seeing the possession of certain kinds of emotion as doing rather more than assisting the performance of duties discerned by reason. Emotions are instead regarded as epistemologically necessary for certain kinds of evaluative knowledge, and as also representing a *constitutive* (and thus non-instrumental) part of what certain virtues actually are. In this way, it is not so much that the emotional dimension of moral character is promoted in relation to the intellectual part, but that the two are not to be considered as separable. Together they form a distinct way of seeing.

The virtuous person's ability to perceive ethical salience is something that often requires emotional engagement in those concrete situations where choices are to be made. The wholly dispassionate person will consequently have a distinctly inferior kind of moral vision however refined their powers of reason may be. Like the *akratic*, they may register the same things as the virtuous person, but not in the same way, or with the same resonances.

They do not merely fail to have an affective or desiring element to go along with accurate cognition, but do not have the kind of perception that is made up of all these features. Properly cultivated emotions enable a kind of vision to which they can have no access. We may doubt, therefore, whether a person who is epistemologically disadvantaged in this sense, like the person whose lack of sympathy prevents them from seeing the existence of needfulness when a child is in danger, will prove able to respond in the way which certain virtues require. Yet despite this, a Kantian may still respond that if a person's actions are willed in accordance with duty it cannot matter whether or not their emotions had been engaged in their conception of the moral situation. We may, for instance, be able to compensate for our lack of emotional advantage by performing actions of the kind we imagine an emotionally engaged person would perform. Possessing an emotion, they would say, even if it is often of epistemological assistance, remains an instrumental good that cannot by itself add any extra worth to the performance of a morally right action.

But as we know, it is not action but character that is the focus of the Aristotelian ethical viewpoint. This being so, we are able to claim that there is a real moral difference between two people who act to help a friend if one acts out of sympathy but the other is dispassionately dutiful. For writers such as Michael Stocker, this suggests that it is only those with emotional involvement in the welfare of their friends who are able to enjoy the goods of friendship and similar virtues of attachment.¹⁸ This is the case just as it is that we would not consider someone to be patient if they fought to remain silent in the face of considerable feelings of irritation. Emotions are not merely required epistemologically for virtuous action but are constitutive of the virtues themselves. Right emotion can make right action even better in that it shows that the action is performed in the context of deeply felt ongoing commitments. A lack of emotion will indicate that the actions are being performed from a character which is not fully suffused and integrated in this way. The focus upon character will also mean that emotions can be of moral worth even when they do not

connect with the performance of an action. Instead, they show that a person has, or has not, perceived a moral situation with the degree of emotional intensity characteristic of full virtue. We will differentiate accordingly between the sort of person who reacts with anger at a great injustice and the sort who could not care less, even if there is no course of action which could have been taken to rectify the situation. Similarly, to refer back to an earlier topic of discussion, there is a sense in which we would expect a fully moral person to experience regret for the course of action that they could not choose when faced with a tragic dilemma. Although such feelings cannot alter the consequences of one's choice (which is why some have thought them to be irrational), to lack them would seem to indicate that the moral importance of the alternatives forming the dilemma was in some way ill-perceived.¹⁹

We should of course see that virtues, being diverse qualities, will differ with regard to the kind of role emotions occupy. Justice, for instance, does not seem to centre around the control or cultivation of any particular emotion, but around an evaluative judgement concerning the relative fairness of certain states of affairs. Executive virtues such as courage, where acknowledged danger is faced for the sake of good, are of the kind for which the virtuous person's emotions are the area of concern, but would seem to count for little in any positive sense. We would only be concerned that their practical reasoning was not hampered or overwhelmed by fear. For those like Von Wright, virtues of this kind would appear to be paradigmatic. Yet for other kinds of virtue, such as friendship, tenderness or charity, we can imagine how appropriate feelings of love or sympathy towards the object of our intended actions might in fact be too weak for the achievement of virtue to be possible. It would seem hard to imagine how someone who does not affectively care for the feelings of anyone other than himself would be able to be a tender person (as distinct from being able, on occasion, to act in a tender manner). The possession of virtues such as these would seem to centre around the positive character of certain interpersonal

emotions, to the extent that it becomes hard to see how one could ever be satisfied with any account of morality which was unable to afford them this place.

It should be clear that an approach to moral education influenced by the sort of Aristotelian account of the emotional dimension of life developed here will depart in important ways from those based upon what I have called an 'intellectualist' account. Emotional states will not be seen as essentially destabilising conditions which cannot enjoy moral worth without the independent sanction of sovereign reason, but as aspects of life which may be both necessary for correct moral response and form an irreducible part of that response itself. None of this should suggest that emotions cannot often be guilty of exactly those crimes for which 'intellectualists' accuse them. If we are so overcome by fear that we cannot save a child from drowning in a shallow pond, it is clear that we need to learn to differentiate the kinds of things which are truly fearsome (waterfalls and rapids) from those which are not (ponds), and that we should attempt to adjust our emotional characters in response. In cases such as these, it is the way in which the morally mature person no longer feels the pull of youthful impulses (such as a fear of pondwater) that marks them out as having undergone the kind of emotional transition involved in becoming courageous. Even when emotions are more constitutively required for certain virtues such as love and sympathy, it is equally possible that they might require some degree of suppression. It is perfectly likely that one's feelings of affection or pity for another person may be so intense that they can serve to overwhelm good judgement by perhaps increasing the possibility that an expressive action will be performed instead of a more restrained but more loving or pitiful alternative, or that feelings prove so intense that any choice of action appears unworthy of them. Emotions are not valuable merely as themselves, but as essential components of the complex states of character we term virtues. And as they are so often *essential* components, they require not only suppression or canalisation but cultivation also.

The cultivation of the emotions would take its place within a moral education that concentrates not only upon cognitive development, but upon the broader subject of the whole person's growing character. Whilst admitting that the emotional dimension of character retains a certain unavailability to intentional attempts at its shaping, control and cultivation that is not the case with the strictly rational dimension, it is most certainly not to be ignored. It is a vital part of such moral education that attempts are made to encourage the development of emotions in directions which allow them to form essential parts of virtuous characters. As such, its associated pedagogic techniques would go beyond the schematic 'problem-solving' of intellectualist approaches, to encompass a consideration of how moral themes and choices pervade the complex lives of concrete individuals. As I have suggested earlier, it is within the narrative structures presented by biography, personalised accounts and fiction that moral choices are most clearly seen in relation to the emotionally-imbued character of the chooser, rather than as impersonal, quasi-scientific problems. As with the connected use of art and music, as well as participation in those activities with which certain emotions are characteristically associated, these educational techniques can serve to draw out the often primitive emotional responses of children in ways that impersonal and intellectualised examples cannot. Simply providing children with the stimuli to arouse emotions which they may not have otherwise experienced can serve to make such feelings more a part of their 'second nature'. Only in this way can such feelings later become the foundation for developed virtues. It is therefore essential that children are used to feeling a certain way when listening, for instance, to accounts of the weal and woe of other people. This kind of learning through experience would here aid the development of sympathy. As well as experiencing the particular feelings associated with that virtue itself, it is equally important that children are brought to feel pleasure resulting from successful virtuous activity, and pain resulting from its frustration. As Aristotle states, "we need to be brought up, right from early youth, as Plato says, to find enjoyment and pain in the right

things.”²⁰ This fusing of pleasure and pain to the cause of the ‘noble’ provides the motivational ‘engine’ for moral development that we have found to be lacking from alternative educational approaches.²¹

Once elicited in this way, the emotions of children can subsequently be subject to cultivation into the more complex and subtle forms that will assist and comprise superior moral responses - a development which will be the source of pleasure.²² This will involve engagement in activities which require a certain base level of emotional maturity to begin with, but which can help greatly in the enrichment of those emotions (one might think especially of community work with the disabled), together with the development of a critical understanding of when and where different emotional responses are appropriate, and when and where they may be ill-directed, sentimentalist or patronising. As Aristotle’s theory of emotion describes them as cognitive and intentional phenomena, emotional education can proceed through this kind of progressive refinement of their constitutive cognitions. Nancy Sherman’s Aristotelian account of the role of parents in habituation describes this well:

The parent helps the child compose the scene in the right way. This will involve persuading the child that the situation at hand is to be construed in this way rather than that, that what the child took to be a deliberate assault and cause for anger was really only an accident, that the laughter and smiles which annoy were intended as signs of delight rather than of teasing, that a particular distribution, though painful to endure, is in fact fair - that if one looked at the situation from the point of view of the others involved, one would come to that conclusion.²³

Especially important to this process will be encouraging children to look beyond the temporally and spatially immediate ways of satisfying their emotional desires, and consider the ways in which a longer or wider view may prove to be the better one even though it involves the difficult task of delaying the pleasure derived from virtuous choice. Once used to choosing the latter option, it would be hoped that the attractions held by the more immediate sources of pleasure begin to subside as they begin to be classified as ‘ignoble’

and ill-befitting of the sort of person the child has now become. This is how the temperate person is able to ignore the impulses of appetite and act for the sake of the 'proper enjoyment of bodily pleasures' of which they have learned to partake. As we know, the *akratic* does not have his or her emotions ordered correctly with regard to such pleasure and, in spite of their better judgement, falls prey to the remaining temptations of impulse and appetite. The extension of emotions which have 'listened to reason' thereby supports the simultaneously developing virtue of practical wisdom, by means of which a desire for virtuous ends finds its fruition in action performed at the appropriate time and place, and in the appropriate way.

The manner in which I have begun to describe how a neo-Aristotelian form of moral education would approach the cultivation of the emotions has relied upon a developmental account of upbringing or habituation - what Aristotle terms *ethismos*. It has also shown that habituation is not to be thought of as mindless process of emotional manipulation in the service of a subsequent acquisition of practical wisdom, but as encompassing the integrated and mutually corrective development of all (cognitive, affective and conative) aspects of a virtuous character. I shall attempt in the next section of this chapter to describe the most important features of this developmental process in a way that encompasses all of these aspects, and with regard to the forms of moral education which this account best supports.

The Development of Virtue

The aim of moral upbringing within an Aristotelian schema is to effect the transition of a child's character from its untutored state (albeit one which is 'ready for virtue'), to a state in which virtue becomes 'second nature'. This is not something which occurs naturally as though it were a kind of irreversible ripening, but a precarious process reliant upon the continual pedagogic interference of others who are in the best position to guide the child towards his or her²⁴ goal - full ethical humanity. With assistance from those who know

better, the child can eventually become able to make virtuous judgements and perform virtuous actions on their own account. Once they reach this experienced standard of excellence in emotion, perception and deliberation, they are then in a position to hand on their understanding of virtue to the less mature. How, though, does this development take place?

The child is understood by Aristotle as beginning in an initial state when his or her desiderative capacities (the *orektikon*, which as we know differ from both the growth and decay of physiology and the activities of the 'strictly rational' part as being the subject of *ethismos*) are largely taken up by urges of appetite (*epithumai*) and the kinds of emotional inclination which go little beyond the fear, anger, joy and such like which accompany the thwarting or meeting of these kinds of need. These motivational propensities will centre around the enjoyment of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and it is to this end that the child aims in its primitive cognitive activities. Although the third aspect of the *orektikon*, the rational wish or *boulesis* which is the kind of deliberative motivation resulting from an assessment of value, is just as fundamental to human nature, it remains in the background during childhood as it "depends on cultivation and adventitious knowledge".²⁵ This being so, he or she is at this stage incapable of the reasoned, *prohairetic* choices of virtuous adults. Although capable of more simple kinds of rational activity such as the deliberation involved in choosing a toy or a sweet, the child does not as yet have the ability to choose in the light of deliberation which takes all things into consideration (including a ranking of the various goods aimed for). He or she has yet to embark upon the process which shall result in them ceasing to be at the 'beck and call' of their basic desires, and begin to exert some degree of rational control upon them.

Aristotle's famous (though none too detailed when one considers its centrality to his ethics) account of how moral development takes place rests upon the notion of habituation - that we learn to be virtuous by doing virtuous things. In his own words,

... the things we have to learn before we can do we learn by doing, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre, so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts... The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger, some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or another in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, dispositions arise out of like activities.²⁶

As I have mentioned before, this might initially seem to involve a problematic circularity. How can a means of acquiring virtue rest upon the performance of acts that require virtue themselves? Aristotle's answer, of course, is that the acts performed by the learner are virtuous only in the sense that they are of the kind which would be performed by a virtuous person - they do not as yet express the full virtue which is the aim of the exercise. Thus if the learner and the virtuous person both decline to over-indulge their appetites during a meal, it will be in the character of the latter, who chooses (with full knowledge) for the sake of moderation and experiences no conflicting motivations, that temperance is truly exhibited. The learner may choose to act in a like way only in order to gain the praise of others, but in experiencing what it is to choose temperately it is hoped that such choices will become easier and more a part of his own character in the future - they will become habitual, and the learner will have developed a "kinship to virtue".²⁷ At the initial stage of development, when children act largely for the immediate attractions of pleasure, the educator (in this case, most often the parent), will attempt to make virtuous conduct attractive to the child in these terms. Moderation of immature appetites and emotions (such as fits of anger) will be greeted with praise, reward and encouragement, while contrary conduct will attract admonishment and perhaps punishment.²⁸ The aim of this is not merely to get the child to perform the desired acts (although there is an attraction in this), as it would be if one were training an animal, but is to enable and support his or her progress to the stage when they will choose to perform such acts in full knowledge, for their own sake, and out of a settled and enduring character, as would a virtuous person. It is therefore important that the child is encouraged to see the actions they perform as being, in this

sense, their own, and that habituation is not a merely non-cognitive enterprise but engages with the child's incipient attempts at moral deliberation.²⁹

To this end, the role of the parent or educator is to aid the child's acquisition of what Aristotle terms 'the that' (*hoti*) - the practical knowledge of what is the right thing to do in particular circumstances, as well as the states of character which allow this practical know-how to function correctly. The advice and instructions which are given therefore serve a number of concurrent purposes. First of all, they introduce the child to the idea that actions differ in quality from one another in terms that do not merely reduce to degree to which they satisfy his or her appetites or emotions as they are presently constituted. Faced with a table full of food, they will learn that there are reasons why they should not eat more than a certain amount even if they would get pleasure from doing so. At such an early stage, the child will perhaps not be able to understand these reasons fully or at all (let alone act consistently on them), but they will learn that such reasons exist. And not only this, they will also learn that such reasons will count for others to such a degree that they will have to act in accordance with them or face unattractive consequences. Equally, continued experience and assistance will involve a developing knowledge of how such reasons are differentiated amongst themselves (in other words, the variety of virtues), and of the kinds of conduct that are appropriate in all kind of concrete situations. As MacIntyre has put it, "... one has to learn... how to conceptualise and to classify, so that in practical reasoning one's descriptions of the situations and issues upon which universal moral truths concerning the virtues have to be brought to bear are in the appropriate form."³⁰ The repetition involved in learning by doing will not be like that involved in body-building, where the mechanical repetition of an identical action over and over again produces the desired result. Instead, the virtuous actions which are repeated will never be identical in this way, varying, as they always will, according to the specificities of the concrete circumstances in which the performances takes place. It is therefore essential that the learner becomes able to see why

it is that externally dissimilar actions are united in being examples of one and the same virtue. This is what is being learnt when a child is encouraged to see the importance of acting in a fair or honest way with strangers, even though they have only previously encountered these standards of behaviour when amongst friends. At the other extreme, the child must also learn that there are times when apparently identical actions are *not* similarly virtuous. We might imagine an example being the difference between generously giving something of one's own to a friend, and doing the same thing when the gift has already been promised to another. In being brought to see this, the child is making an advance in the ability I have referred to as 'moral perception', and further refining this aspect of their emotional life.

This is how the motivations of pleasure and pain can allow a way in to the development of an active sense of 'the noble', even if this does not as yet hold any attractions for the child themselves. They will now know that justice, temperance, friendship and the like are virtues and valuable just for being so, but they will not be sure quite *why* this is so. The degree of moral development which means that the learner becomes able to provide answers to questions of this second sort involves an acquisition of what Aristotle terms 'the because' (*dioti*).³¹ It will be hoped that the sense of achievement and satisfaction which a child has from their growing capacity for virtuous conduct performed under guidance, will lead to them becoming able to distance themselves from their emotionally and appetitively driven pursuit of goods desired as pleasant to a degree which allows room for a *bouletic* pursuit of goods desired as noble. In doing so, he or she begins to focus upon objectives which are less immediate than those which they sought previously, and thus starts to deliberate in the manner which can form part of true *prohairesis*, and of the virtue of practical wisdom. Initially, they will be taught that the delaying of gratification is both possible and worthwhile by being shown how it can aid the attainment of the appetitive pleasures for which they are already aiming - that by resisting certain impulses they can better satisfy others. Once this knowledge is attained, it is possible that the more distant

gratifications of virtuous conduct will no longer appear to be either impossible or pointless. In being able to choose like this, the learner will become able to experience the kinds of 'noble joy' that the virtuous person has in satisfying their desire for noble ends (although the pleasure of this joy will not, of course, be the aim of virtuous action). The result should be that those appetitive and emotional pleasures which he or she had previously desired will either be legitimated by their newly acquired desire for the noble, or else come to be seen as disgraceful (*aischron*) and unworthy of the type of person he or she has become.³² The attractions they once held gradually slip away.

Yet despite this development, the virtuous choices of which he or she is now capable remain a precarious achievement. For although they can now be made from an independent understanding of the noble value inherent in them, they may not, as yet, flow from a character that is fully and stably integrated. There may be occasions, therefore, when the learner who has gained the capacity for fully virtuous choice will nevertheless suffer a conflict between the motivations he or she has recently come to possess, and those which reflect an earlier and inferior stage of their moral development. The result of such conflict will be choices anticipating either the mere continence, or the *akrasia* of the mature moral agent. The aim of the advanced stages of moral education will be to ensure that the development of full virtue, which will often be a hesitant and irregular process (some kinds of virtue proving easier to 'master' than others), comes eventually to pervade the learner's entire life. Once this is so, they will possess a character which is firm, unchangeable and self-endorsed in the cause of virtue, and which provides them with settled patterns of proper satisfaction in the choices they have now become able to make.

It is people of this sort who Aristotle has in mind as the right sort of audience for his lectures on ethics, and for ethical teaching (*didaskalia* - teaching in the formal sense, to be contrasted with habituation) more generally.³³ Only once they have been brought into the fold of the truly virtuous can they appreciate the lessons which this kind of study holds for

them (these are not lessons for the moral sceptic). Teaching about ethics in this sense will provide students with the means to arrive at a more general defence of the manner of life into which they have been habituated. It is not that such lessons will add any further moral worth to the ability to reliably pick out, and act correctly upon, the salient moral features of concrete situation. As Aristotle says, at "... the starting point is the fact ['the that']; and if this is sufficiently clear there will be no reason to ascertain the reason why."³⁴ This ability is, in a sense, all that virtue is. Instead, the more general and theoretical account provided by the more formalised teaching of ethics will allow the student to become familiar with how argumentative procedures of philosophy apply to the ethical field. From this understanding, the student should gain both a confidence in the defensibility of their chosen life of virtue, and a means of rejecting the pseudo-philosophical arguments of the charlatan. They acquire the ability to differentiate "... between those arguments which are appropriate to it [ethics] and those which are foreign".³⁵

This understanding of the nature of moral development, and of the educational strategies which assist it, is clearly very different from that which underlies the orthodox approaches I have discussed critically thus far. Perhaps the most important difference lies in the attitude taken to the avowal of any concrete moral position by the moral educator. For those approaches which we have termed 'rationalist' or 'intellectualist', this would, as we know, be to go beyond the proper remit of education - this being to provide children with the knowledge and skills to make autonomous choices of their own. Educators should, on this account, employ only those kinds of pedagogic strategy which can co-exist happily with the maintenance of a neutral position between the multifarious moral positions on any particular issue. Only in this way will they be able to avoid imposing their own views upon children, or prejudicing their future moral choices. The neo-Aristotelian educator, however, will have severe disagreements with this stricture on his or her practice. They will stress that noble efforts aimed at encouraging children to be reflective and autonomous in their moral

lives must be based upon the solid ground of properly habituated character. As one proponent of character-based education has stated:

To suppose that there can be effective moral reflection without a first stage in which categories are learned and habits and attitudes are formed is as naive in its way as to suppose that secondary-school mathematics can be taught effectively to girls and boys who have never learned number concepts or (perhaps a better analogy) to suppose that we can explore the limits of our obligations to other people with a student who never heard that anyone else has rights.³⁶

The earliest stages of moral education will therefore consist of a more or less dogmatic introduction of children to those central moral norms which will form the basis of their subsequent moral education and reflection. Although the educator should make every effort to promote children's independent rational support for these norms, this is, at this time, less important than them actually coming to believe in them, and acting in ways which express these beliefs. The worry that such dogmatism will unjustifiably prejudice children's future moral choices will not concern the neo-Aristotelian who insists that without an initial prejudicing towards virtue and away from vice a child cannot ever become a moral *chooser*. For choice (*prohairesis*) is not a simple matter of just picking one option whilst aware of alternatives, but requires a full perception and understanding of the moral value inherent in each alternative - abilities which require the 'eye' which only experience of virtue can provide. And in attempting to develop this ability, the teacher must show that the values at stake in choice are not mere options to be picked as though little rested upon them, but are crucially important and thus deserving of serious deliberation. For the teacher to refrain from expressing their own moral opinions may indicate to children that he or she did not consider them to merit this sort of importance in his or her own life. So that they are able to teach children that moral values are to become central attachments in their lives, the teacher, as Mary Warnock has argued, "... must have views, principles, attitudes, even passions; and it is only if he is seen to be a moral agent that he can teach his children to be moral agents too."³⁷

At later stages of moral education, the teacher may well find that stepping back from dogmatic instruction in favour of a more open and exploratory approach may be a more effective pedagogic strategy if it promotes the *phronetic* ability of children to better apply in practice those virtues which have become central parts of their character, or to rationally endorse these from a more reflective position. It should be stressed that this can only be a subsidiary aim to the shaping of character in the cause of virtue. There is no question whether it is more important for a child to become the sort of person who acts virtuously yet does so in an unreflective manner, or the sort who has an reflective attachment to non-virtuous causes.³⁸ Yet there will, nonetheless, exist moral issues for which answers are not readily supplied by those core values which have formed the basis of the earlier stages of moral habituation. It will not be enough here that children are brought up to be honest, kind, and courageous, if there are levels of reasonable disagreement, not so much about whether these *are* virtues, but about whether or not certain kinds of conduct count as representatives of them.³⁹ For children to progress beyond the moral *impasses* which can result from encounters with such difficult situations of choice, they will require kinds of imaginative deliberation which are better learnt from less dogmatic advice and instruction, and from more complex forms of direct moral experience (including, importantly, experience of the failures as well as the successes that life can bring).⁴⁰

Where it is the school that is responsible for assisting moral development, the neo-Aristotelian will be wary of the ‘special lessons in morality’ that are central to the approaches advocated by both Lawrence Kohlberg and John Wilson.⁴¹ These writers had maintained that moral thinking, as a rational pursuit with its own logical procedures, should aspire to be considered as a school subject on an equal footing with others in the academic curriculum. Only then would it be taken seriously enough by educators and children alike. For those educators interested more in the development of moral character, the notion that morality could be dealt with in this way would produce a somewhat different reaction.

Rather than supplying moral thinking with the respect it deserves, its bracketing as a curriculum subject in itself could, they might suggest, produce the negative effect of its trivialisation. For children may begin to think that once they had closed their 'morality textbooks' and listened to the week's last moral dilemma they had now left behind this kind of obtuse and arcane study until their next lesson. In doing so, they are as Aristotle remarks, "... behaving rather like invalids who listen carefully to their doctor, but carry out none of his instructions".⁴² And just as "the bodies of the latter will get no benefit from such treatment, so the souls of the former will get none from such philosophy".⁴³ Lessons in moral thinking may be enjoyable, or have other benefits for children, but they cannot provide for us all that we require from moral education. No doubt, schools by themselves cannot alone do all of this, but they can certainly do rather more than rest content with the provision of special lessons in morality.

Instead of being encouraged (albeit indirectly) to see morality as an intellectual matter confined to the academic curriculum, children should ideally be brought to see how it is not a subject which can be pigeon-holed in this way, but which instead impinges upon all of teaching and all areas of life, within school and without. It should be expected that teachers of all subjects, from history and English, to biology and technology, should be concerned to exhibit the ways in which moral themes pervade these topics of study. At the same time, they will also be expected to be of such a moral character themselves that they provide worthy living exemplars of virtue to their students. Despite the skills a teacher might have for thinking of the most effective and efficient pedagogical strategies to aid children's moral development we would not, it is claimed, think him or her the ideal person morally to educate them if they were also known to be a morally reprehensible person. As David Carr suggests, this shows how there is an important difference between teaching and other kinds of professionalism such as medicine where we do not have the same worries about the doctor's own character as long as they can heal effectively.⁴⁴ In this way, moral education

extends not only beyond specialist lessons and into the rest of school life, but also beyond a conception of education as a ‘technical practice’ and into the personal lives of teachers.

This last point clearly exhibits one way in which the neo-Aristotelian account of moral education I have presented throughout this chapter would prove to be politically controversial in the context of contemporary Western societies. As Alasdair MacIntyre has recognised, “... to appoint teachers on the grounds of their moral character is something so much at odds with the general beliefs of the dominant liberal culture about education that there will be a good deal of reluctance even to entertain this possibility”.⁴⁵ Equally, the notion that children need to internalise a particular set of core values before they can begin to think about morality and make moral choices for themselves, will certainly provoke opposition from those who do not themselves share a commitment to these core values. The ‘fragmentation’ or pluralisation of value that is thought by many to be endemic to contemporary liberal societies would seem to foreshadow severe problems for the state in justifying this kind of educational enterprise. Where reasonable citizens of a liberal society disagree about many of the moral values that would be central to any ambitious programme of moral education of the kind I been discussing here, it would seem that pressing ahead could only fail to treat these citizens as equally worthy of respect as those others who are in the position of seeing their particular moral values and interpretations prioritised by public authorities. Whatever its possible “distortions of what it is to acquire a value”⁴⁶, the ideal of educational neutrality is often thus thought to be the only possible way in which moral education can hope to be *politically* satisfactory. Where the alternative to neutrality is thought to be civil strife, it is not difficult to see why many theorists will allot the concerns I have been raising up to now a secondary place (at the most) to the prior imperative of securing the stability of the liberal state. The problem which presents itself therefore, is whether the practical institution of a neo-Aristotelian, virtue-ethical, or character-based form of moral education is impossible given the political reality of contemporary liberal

societies. Has the account I have given, whatever its merits, committed the sin of being merely utopian? In the remaining chapters, I shall address this very issue.

¹ Oakley, J *op. cit.* p. 8.

² Sartre, J.P. *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* trans. by Mairet, P (1962, London, Methuen).

³ Solomon, R *The Passions* (1976, Anchor, Doubleday).

⁴ Peters, R.S. *Moral Development and Moral Education* (1981, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 171.

⁵ Hirst, P and Peters R.S. *The Logic of Education* (1970, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 49. As cited in Dunlop, F *The Education of Feeling and Emotion* (1984, London, George Allen and Unwin) p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Peters, R.S. 'The Education of the Emotions' in Deardon, R Hirst, P and Peters R.S. (eds.) *Education and the Development of Reason* (1972, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 479.

⁸ The 'moral components' approach advocated by John Wilson deals with the emotional dimension of morality in an essentially similar way - 'EMP' representing a morally-educated persons ability to conceptualise and identify emotions both in others and oneself. There is no sense, for him, in which emotion could be educated in a way which did not represent a development of the power of reason over them. He defends this approach in his book *Education in Religion and the Emotions* (1972, London, Heinemann) with the thought that questions such as "what sort of things ought to be desired or feared?" could only produce 'a purely conceptual answer... which is of no practical use, or... empirical generalisations, the truth of which is contingent upon a) particular, and b) mutable, empirical facts.'" (p. 90) Only an education in the "general principles of rationality for practical living" (p. 91) could avoid these difficulties.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Francis Dunlop presents a similar example to this in countering Peters' claim that emotions such as grief and wonder (which he regards as paradigmatically passive) resist being understood as motives. Dunlop, F *op. cit.* p. 14.

¹¹ His only exception being the somewhat dispassionate sounding respect (*Achtung*) for the moral law. Cf. Oakley, J *op. cit.* p. 86.

¹² Kant, I *The Doctrine of Virtue* trans. by Gregor, M (1964, New York, Harper and Row) p. 14.

¹³ It may seem strange that such traits as a lack self-worth or of bodily appetite are considered as vices in the same way as cowardice and greed. To modern readers, only the latter pair would actually seem to be truly worthy of possible castigation, whilst the former would perhaps attract only some sympathy. This problem is corrected once we realise that Aristotle was not engaged in the modern enterprise of differentiating moral from immoral activities (indeed the Greeks did not truly possess any equivalent for 'moral' used in this quasi-legalistic context). Instead, he was focusing upon the production of virtue as opposed to its status, and in this context all vices are alike in being aspects of character we would prefer people not to develop.

¹⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1102b13.

¹⁵ Aristotle *Rhetoric* trans. by Roberts, WR. (1984, New Jersey, Princeton University Press) 1378a30-2.

¹⁶ Von Wright, G *Varieties of Goodness* (1963, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 147. This view is also found in one of the few recent discussions of virtues in moral education. In his *The Rehabilitation of Virtue op. cit.*, Robert Sandin writes that the "... function of virtue is to overcome the tendency for judgement to be influenced by passions that might adversely affect the understanding of what is good or evil, beneficial or harmful, obligatory or non-obligatory in the situation calling for decision." p. 165 .

¹⁷ Certain writers have refuted the reading of Kant which suggests that emotions can assist motivation by duty. Richard Henson, for example, claims that an act only had moral worth for Kant if it is performed in the absence of any 'cooperating inclinations'. Henson, RG 'What Kant Might Have Said: Moral Worth and the Overdetermination of Dutiful Action' in *Philosophical Review* 1979 vol. 88 no. 1.

¹⁸ Stocker, M 'How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' in Crisp, R (ed.) *How One Should Live* (1996, Oxford, Clarendon Press) pp. 180-1. Cp. Stocker, M 'The

Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' *op. cit.*; Oakley, J *op. cit.* pp. 57-63. In a number of works, Lawrence Blum has also argued for a similar view.

¹⁹Of course, the sentimentalist indulgence of emotion in such situations, often to the extent to which it endangers one's capability to carry out an action when it *is* possible and appropriate, will attract moral criticism. This would also apply to the pharisaical concentration upon the outward and public display of emotion at the expense of authentic 'inner' feelings. Cp. Stocker, M 'How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' *op. cit.* p. 182; Korsgaard, C 'From Duty and For the Sake of the Noble; Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action' in Engstrom, S and Whiting, J (eds.) *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics* (1997, Oxford, Oxford University Press) p. 226.

²⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1104b11-13.

²¹ This does not mean that virtuous activity must always be 'pleasurable' as such. Indeed, much of it will involve physical discomfort. The sense of pleasure here is that such activity is performed 'gladly' in the cause of its good objective. The interpretation of Aristotle which suggests that the experiencing of pleasure in the 'sake of the noble' is the central aim of moral habituation has been offered by both Myles Burnyeat (*op. cit.*) and Nancy Sherman who writes that '... it is the pleasure proper to a particular activity that impels us to perform that activity the next time with greater discrimination and precision.' (*op. cit.* pp. 157-199).

²² This view is supported by the 1973 psychological work of Lepper and Greene which suggests that children have an intrinsic pleasure in acquiring competence in their tasks, to the extent that the introduction of external rewards served to make the activity in question less enjoyable. Lepper, M and Greene, D 'Undermining Children's Intrinsic Interest with External Rewards : A Test of the Overjustification Hypothesis' in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28 pp. 129-137, cited in Putnam, D 'The Primacy of Virtue in Children's Moral Development' *Journal of Moral Education* 1995 vol. 24 no. 2 pp. 175-183. This claim that people characteristically prefer more complex activities over simplistic ones is what John Rawls has famously described in his *Theory of Justice* (*op. cit.* section 65) as the 'Aristotelian principle'.

²³ Sherman, N *op. cit.* p. 171.

²⁴ Of course, Aristotle would have restricted these educational intentions to the male child as a result of viewing females as incapable of full rationality, and thus full virtue. I see no reason why we may not reject this view without adversely affecting the viability of his account of ethical upbringing.

²⁵ Broadie, S *op. cit.* pp. 121-122 n. 40.

²⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1103a26-b22.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1179b30.

²⁸ Although Nancy Sherman correctly stresses that Aristotle would see the more coercive forms of external sanction as necessary only for those who are insensitive to reason, and whose "brutish pleasures require brutish methods of restraint." The children within an educational process have a rational capacity which is not distorted in this way, but is merely awaiting its full development. The sanctions appropriate to these learners will therefore be such as to engage their use of reason (blame and admonishment, for example). Sherman, N *op. cit.* pp. 164-65.

²⁹ The traditional view of habituation as a non-cognitive, mechanical process taking place prior to the acquisition of practical wisdom, has most recently been challenged by Sorabji, R *Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue* Rorty, A.O. (ed.) *op. cit.* pp. 201-219, as well as by Nancy Sherman *op. cit.*

³⁰ MacIntyre, A *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So* (1991, University of Lancaster, Centre for the Study of Cultural Values) p. 17.

³¹ *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1095b7. There is some degree of scholarly controversy concerning the proper interpretation of 'the because'. For those favouring the 'blueprint' picture of Aristotle's account of practical reasoning (cf. n. 25), 'the because' equates to an understanding of the extra-ethical function (*ergon*) argument given in Book One of the *Ethics*. This would represent a kind of knowledge sufficient to persuade any rational agent of the merits of a virtuous life. Yet, as we have seen, this claim sits uneasily with Aristotle's remarks concerning the restriction of good-upbringing for those wishing to listen to his lectures on ethics. Instead, we might interpret Aristotle as meaning that whilst those who have 'the that' are able to pick out examples of virtue in various concrete situations, and act in accordance with their knowledge, those who have a grasp of 'the because' act virtuously *because* they know the action is virtuous. In this respect they fulfil one of Aristotle's conditions of full virtuous action, that it is chosen for its own sake rather than for any external reward that is associated with it. This is possible only once they have an active sense of the noble. Cf. Vasilou, I *op. cit.* pp. 787-791.

³² The importance of this for the learner is why Aristotle describes the feeling of shame as being a semi-virtue. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1128b10-21.

³³ *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1095b4-5, 1098a33-38.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 1095b6/7.

³⁵ Aristotle 'The Eudemian Ethics' 1216b46-48 trans. by Sherman, *N op. cit.* p. 196.

³⁶ Kupperman, J *op. cit.* p. 176. It is perhaps a little ironic that the example of a basic moral truth should here be the existence of rights when many of those who doubt such claims do so from a neo-Aristotelian perspective.

³⁷ Warnock, M *Schools of Thought* (1977, London, Faber and Faber) p. 141.

³⁸ This is reflectiveness in a rather strong sense, relating to the formal defence of ethical positions within philosophical discourse. It is of course a central part of being virtuous (as opposed to behaving as a virtuous person would) that the agent chooses to behave well on account of reasoning which reflects the virtue in question. For Aristotle, ensuring virtuous behaviour should always to be the first aim of the educator. The self-endorsement of the fully virtuous person and the reflectiveness of those in possession of 'the because' is only able to take root once this solid ground has been prepared. In contemporary liberal democracies we may feel that a distinction needs to be drawn between those virtues for which we would aim to encourage appropriate behaviour where this conflicted with the encouragement of autonomous attachment to the virtue (with regard to racial discrimination for instance) and those for which the opposite would be the case (religious faith, abortion). For liberals, I suggest that this distinction would be drawn in roughly the same place as that between 'the good' and 'the right'. For a critical discussion of the validity of this distinction see Sher, G *Beyond Neutrality* (1997, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) pp. 37-44.

³⁹ Although it is a less common form of moral disagreement, there have been times when what once were virtues have ceased to be so, or have even come to be considered vices. The most well discussed example of this regards the Aristotelian virtue of pride (possessed by the good person who takes an accurate view of his own good conduct), which became a vice following the Christian promotion of humility as a virtue. Others (most notably Alasdair MacIntyre) have also argued that the Greek vice of acquisitiveness (*pleonexia*) has acquired the status of a virtue within the context of capitalist economic systems. For further discussion of the status of *pleonexia* see Williams, B 'Justice as a Virtue' in Rorty, AO (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (1980, Berkeley CA, University of California Press).

⁴⁰ I am not suggesting here that schools should *intend* for children to fail. It would be of no benefit if they were to engage in pursuits in which they had no chance of success. What I am suggesting is that schools should not be so swayed by a concern to encourage success that children are kept away from those activities in which there is even a chance of failure. For this would be to ignore the fairly commonplace thought that it is only in activities where there is a chance (and, indeed, an experience) of both success and failure, can the former be a real achievement at all. It is from this kind of activity that the most valuable lessons are learnt. Joseph Raz makes a similar point (but with wider scope) in his *Ethics in the Public Domain* (1995, Oxford, Clarendon Press) p. 19.

⁴¹ Although as I have suggested earlier, Kohlberg's more recent work has focussed upon the creation of what he terms 'just school communities', Wilson has remained adamant in his opposition to those members of the educational establishment who 'resist' the provision of lessons in moral thinking. Cf. Wilson, J *A New Introduction to Moral Education* (1990, London, Cassell) *passim*.

⁴² *Nicomachean Ethics op. cit.* 1105b16-18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Carr, D 'Moral Values and the Teacher: Beyond the Paternal and the Permissive' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* vol. 27 no. 2 1993 pp. 193-207.

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, A *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So op. cit.* p. 19.

⁴⁶ Carr, D *Educating the Virtues op. cit.* p. 198.



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Chapter Five

The Politics of Moral Education: Virtue in the Modern World

Recent years have witnessed a rising level of popular disquiet about the moral values and conduct of younger generations. As it is charged that more and more young people are engaging in anti-social and criminal activity (especially of a violent nature) at earlier and earlier stages of their lives, many commentators maintain that this is indicative of a more general breakdown in respect for social mores and traditional forms of authority. Figures such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, the chief executive of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Nicholas Tate, and Frances Lawrence, the widow of the murdered London headmaster Phillip Lawrence, have all notably contributed to the controversy regarding this perceived 'moral decline', and have identified the institution which they think should shoulder much of the responsibility for this regrettable process, as well as being the proper focus of our attempts for renewal. This institution is education. Carey, for instance, told a recent conference that "values and morals do not grow on trees or fall like manna from heaven" and that "... we want people who leave school to be good citizens and good neighbours, not just stuffed heads and effective contributors to the economy".¹ Schools therefore have a definite responsibility for the proper moral upbringing of the children entrusted to their care. Tate has complained similarly that many teachers are so overwhelmed by the fear of engaging in indoctrination, that they are unable to properly fulfill the requirements essential to worthwhile forms of moral education.² For many of the contributors to this debate the answer to our present predicament is clear to see. There is a simple choice to be made between an education founded upon a clearly defined moral code and an amoral education, for to teach an indeterminate morality is to teach no morality at all. In the cause of renewal therefore, we must aim to discover our socially shared morality, and be forthright in our efforts to reproduce it in the minds of schoolchildren.

It is of course proper to retain a healthy degree of scepticism about claims such as these. Ours is certainly not the only age in which people have seen reason to voice concerns about the degenerating state of morality amongst the young. In fact, there is little to suggest that this is not a feature common in some way to the thought of all ages. Equally, we should remain wary of joining in with the reactionary scapegoating of schools and teachers that so often seems to be a corollary of such thoughts. It is easy to see why the apportioning of blame in this manner can prove particularly attractive for those keen to deflect criticism away from the failings of aspects of our society for which they themselves have responsibility. Such notes of caution do not, however, mean that there are no deficiencies in the way that we go about the moral education of the young that call out for analysis and remedy. Indeed the claim that such deficiencies do in fact exist is central to my arguments thus far. Yet this may, at first thought, appear to indicate a slightly paradoxical situation. For as Damon and Colby have noted in a recent article looking back at the last quarter of a century's research into moral education, the perceived decline in the behaviour of young people to which I have here referred, has occurred during precisely the same period in which the academic field of moral education has in fact thrived.³ Should we not have expected this development of the discipline to have had a positive effect upon the behaviour of its primary agents of concern? What other practice thrives so much when it is evidently failing by reference to almost every available indicator?

We could, of course, tell a rather different story about the relationship of these two variables, making reference to the way in which the decline in the standards of young people's behaviour is in fact the reason why moral education has thrived to the degree it has. It has existed upon a diet of our moral concern. On this view, the success of moral education is to be judged according to the way in which it stems the degenerative tide, like the proverbial boy's finger in a dyke. Yet although there is no doubt that this suggestion has its merits, I would suggest that a rather more accurate perspective is produced by

combining these two divergent ways of explaining the situation. Moral education must of course cope with a wide variety of social factors that are beyond its control. If society is breaking down we cannot expect the classroom to stand apart from this process like an oasis of calm. It is not so much that it should accept the influence of these wider influences as though it could not do anything to sift the bad from the good (a fatalism which underlies Values Clarification), but that any effective education must be capable of dealing with its subjects (the children) not as mythic or ideal types, but as they actually are. And 'what they are' is not dictated by any absolute conception of human nature or rationality, but by the interplay between these base facts about human beings and the conditioning provided by the contingent features of social development. This view allows us to see how moral education is importantly and necessarily dependent upon the nature of the society in which it operates, but is in no way its mere prisoner. For it is such education that plays one of the most important roles in determining the way in which our children, and thus our society, develops for good or ill.

In previous chapters I have been concerned to show that the approaches to moral education which have dominated this recent period have not only failed to stem the morally degenerative tide, but have also actually assisted the processes which provide this tide with its destructive impetus and power. Impressed by the plurality and uncertainty of moral beliefs and practices in contemporary times, they have taken this to debar educators from promoting any of these beliefs and practices above others, save for those aspects of moral thought which may (or may not) be taken as forming a kind of formal husk within which various particular contents sit equally well. To go beyond this barrier would be to open teachers to the charge that they are not educating, but indoctrinating the children for whom they are responsible. Yet not only, I have argued, does this provide an insufficient degree of elementary moral instruction to those children who do not yet possess the capacity to make serious moral choices, but it also encourages a view of morality which sees it as

predominately a matter of personal preference - precisely the kind of view which many consider to be at the root of our present difficulties. Thus, in search of a viable alternative, I have considered the way in which moral philosophy in the last two decades or so has seen something of a turning away from the kinds of moral philosophy which have underpinned these particular approaches, fostering a return to fashion of the long disregarded 'virtue ethics' tradition, grounded for the most part in the work of Aristotle. Encouraged by these developments, some writers on moral education have begun to articulate ways in which a virtue-centred model of moral education might indeed prove an attractive alternative to present orthodoxies.⁴ My arguments thus far have been largely concerned to detail and indeed advocate the potential benefits of this kind of approach. In the present chapter, I shall investigate whether such optimism about the prospects of a virtue-centred moral education is reasonable. As I have already suggested, this will in good part depend upon the way in which educational recommendations of this sort can be adequately integrated with a preferred account of the political nature of the society which they are intended to both support and shape. For if there is unresolved conflict between these two aspects of theory, it is quite possible that our hopes for educational reform may prove to be irredeemably utopian.

To recap, virtue-ethics is conventionally differentiated from moral thought in both the Kantian and utilitarian traditions in two main ways. Firstly, whilst any such tradition values those habits, dispositions and traits of character which promote thought and action in accordance with their understanding of what is good or right, the virtue-ethicist is distinct in considering these to be the primary location of moral significance. The reason why one should not, for example, deliberately maim people for fun is not that it serves to diminish aggregate utility (as a utilitarian would maintain), or because it represents an attachment to a universalizable principle which one could not rationally wish to consistently hold (as Hare might have claimed), but because it is *cruel*. Secondly, and consequently, correct moral

conduct in any particular situation is not understood as being derived from some general rule or principle (such as 'acts of cruelty are wrong'), but as being the conduct which a person of virtuous moral character (Aristotle's *spoudaios*) would have performed in those circumstances. It therefore represents an agent-based rather than an act-based approach to ethics.

How then, might such an approach to ethics be a preferable model upon which to base our attempts at the reformulation of moral education? We have found, so far, that it possesses at least three importantly advantageous features. Firstly, a central problem of the contemporary approaches I been concerned to criticise (Values Clarification, and the theories of Lawrence Kohlberg and John Wilson) derives from their common denial of the notion that moral judgement is an attempt to respond to the way things really are - that value is there to be found in the world, not to be projected onto it by our preferences. This *non-cognitivist* view would seem, however, to run contrary to much of our ordinary experience of engaging in moral reasoning and choice. If we are not attempting to respond accurately to something real - to 'feel its pull' so to speak - then there would seem to be little to account for the pains we often go to in making sure that a moral choice is the right one. It is integral to virtue-ethics that the worth of one's character, and the choices we make, are subject to more objective criteria than any of those which non-cognitivist theories can provide, and that these criteria relate to more than just the formal logic of moral language.

Secondly, virtue-ethics rejects the role given to ethical rules and principles in orthodox accounts of moral reasoning and education. It is claimed that the centrality which they are often afforded represents a commitment to ethics modeled upon science or law, and falsely represents moral thought as a process of deduction from the general to the particular.⁵ An education based around such a model would therefore ill-equip children to cope with the infinite variety of concrete circumstances in which moral action is called for, possibly

resulting in either an overloading of the kind of judgemental abilities in which they have been educated, or an inflexible denial of the extenuating differences between circumstances in which the same rule is appealed to. Virtue-ethics is alone able to encompass the idea that the complexity and unpredictability of concrete moral situations leads to moral reasoning being essentially uncodifiable in terms of rules or principles. It is the developed sensibility and sensitivity to circumstance of the virtuous, practically wise, agent (the *phronimos*) that enables him or her to correctly choose the right course of action, not their powers of deduction.

The third advantage has to do with the place of the affective dimension within the moral life. In denying the Humean bifurcation between reason and passion, virtue-ethics avoids problems which have afflicted both VC and Kohlberg's approach. VC placed moral judgement firmly within the sphere of emotive response and, because it accepted Hume's distinction, could not grant rational argument any place within morality. As I have said before, it would seem oddly counter-intuitive that we could not envisage a place for rationality in distinguishing between the ethical merits of kindness and cruelty. In attempting to remedy this problem, Kohlberg relocated morality within the cognitive domain, thus enabling rational argument to assume a moral importance, but combined this with a dismissal of the role of supposedly irrational feelings and sentiments. Children must be taught to control these passive responses so as to ensure a clear path for reason to take. Many critics have felt that such an *intellectualist* view of the nature of moral judgement obscures the constitutive role that emotion plays in the acquisition of many virtues⁶, and would therefore have very real difficulties in explaining fully why we may be motivated to act in the ways that reason demands of us. Virtue-ethics differs from both approaches in conceiving the source and starting-point of morality as being the promotion and refinement of a child's positive affective responses, and a disciplining of their negative ones. This takes place through a process of critical habituation (*ethismos*) to virtuous conduct, during which

a child develops those aspects of rationally ordered sentiment and emotionally enriched cognition which are the mark of the virtuous person.⁷

A problem arises, though, in that it might well be claimed with some confidence that these are advantages in theory only. As I have been concerned to investigate the promise of virtue-ethics as a foundation for the *practical* enterprise of moral education, we will need to see how this may work out in reality if this charge is to be successfully rebutted.

Fortuitously for this task, there have indeed been some efforts in recent years to model school practice in moral education upon approaches which eschew intellectualist orthodoxies in favour of a broader development of character. This has become a rapidly expanding area of interest and practice in the United States, where a large number of ‘character education/development programmes’ have already been instituted in schools with the support of prominent politicians and educationalists.⁸ The former US secretary of education, William Bennett, perhaps the most well-known advocate of this kind of approach, has spoken and written upon numerous occasions concerning the need for American society to concentrate upon the educational development of a set of widely shared virtues in order to avoid impending moral catastrophe. In 1986, for instance, he stated that:

In defining good character we should include specific traits such as thoughtfulness, fidelity, kindness, diligence, honesty, fairness, self-discipline, respect for law, and taking one’s guidance by accepted standards of right and wrong rather than by, for example, one’s personal preferences... There is a good deal of consensus among the American people on the elements that constitute good character traits... Not only is there a consensus among the American people on the elements that constitute good character, most Americans want their schools to help form the character of their children.⁹

As I suggested earlier, recent years have seen similar arguments rise to prominence in the UK. Public figures such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, and Frances Lawrence have accused schools of neglecting their responsibility to produce morally good young people. Criticisms of a similar (and more secular) kind have also come in recent books from cultural commentators Richard Hoggart¹⁰ and Melanie Phillips.¹¹ Yet

one of the more interesting contributions to this debate has come from the aforementioned Nicholas Tate, chief executive of the Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority which oversees the increasingly centralised regulation of what is taught in English and Welsh state schools. This interest derives not so much from the detail of what he has to say, but from the evidence it provides that those with concrete responsibility for the administration of our schools are considering an American-style promotion of character education. A consideration of his arguments might therefore provide us with some insight into the promise held by a concretely instituted program of moral education, based more or less upon the kind of virtue-ethical or character-based model I have been advocating.

Tate's prime concern would seem to be the rise of the dreaded 'relativism', the phenomenon which he sees as being chiefly responsible for the parlous state of contemporary morality and moral education. He bemoans the 'moral relativism lurking in deep corners of our collective psyche that leads some to feel that education is simply about helping children to clarify their own values and make informed choices'.¹² Citing research from Cambridge University, he tells us that teachers are apparently so anxious not to offend minority viewpoints that they reject entirely the distinction between right and wrong and present morality as "largely a matter of taste or opinion". In practice therefore, it would appear that moral education is considered as a task beyond the pale for worried teachers or, where it is attempted at all, goes little further than the kind of Values Clarification which we have found so unsatisfactory. If this is the case, it would appear that some serious efforts at reform are certainly required. As an initial response, Tate has himself called for, and overseen, the establishment of a national forum of 150 religious leaders, teachers, business-people and community leaders to begin the formulation of a modern day version of the Ten Commandments, a contemporary ethical canon to provide the centrepiece of moral education.

Yet when he refers to the negative influence of ‘relativism’ upon British culture, it is not entirely clear what Tate understands this concept to mean. Sometimes it refers to the idea that morality is a mere matter of taste or opinion - a rather vague definition which encompasses both ‘subjectivism’, where the truth value of a moral statement is relative to the consciousness of its utterer, and ‘emotivism’ which takes moral statements to be solely *expressive* of subjective taste or opinion and thus not capable of truth at all. At other times, relativism is taken to be the widely held idea that moral values differ from culture to culture, and that we have no independent rational means of ascertaining which of these are superior (although as Tate idiosyncratically uses the term ‘cultural relativism’ to refer to the “view that no value inheres in cultural products”, this idea remains undifferentiated in his account¹³). This is not a merely semantic issue. Relativism of the sort described by the first definition does indeed present extreme difficulties for any moral educator, for if morals are simply expressions of personal preference, unassailable by any objective standards, then it would appear difficult to justify the imposition of any particular moral viewpoint (however pluralistic) upon learners.¹⁴ It is this unfortunately commonplace notion which does indeed seem to underpin much of the unsatisfactory practice in our schools. But if it is the second concept of relativism that is meant however, this need not *necessarily* be such a problem.

Relativism in this second sense encompasses a complex range of meta-ethical views. In its more extreme variants, it might refer to the claim that morality derives from a “diversity of equally valid modes of thought and ways of life” across the boundaries of which we may make no non-ethnocentric judgement.¹⁵ This view is indeed widely encountered in educational circles and makes very little sense, for if we cannot evaluate alien cultures because they are ‘equally valid’, how is it that we are able to make such claims about their validity in the first place? Equally, this formulation will not allow us to understand the unproblematic idea that moral reform can be instantiated by the rightful pressures of a minority - that, for instance, William Wilberforce could have been justified in fighting

against the 'equally valid' acceptance of slavery in our particular culture. For such reasons, cultural relativism is best expressed as a more sceptical thesis - that the standards particular to our culture cannot apply cross-culturally or, alternatively, that there are no culturally independent standards to which we can appeal in making a moral judgement and what we are justified in so judging depends upon the cultural standards we *do* have at our disposal. Although this leaves open the possibility that other cultures may be so far removed from us that they, in Bernard Williams' words, "present no real option for us", and thus cause our evaluative vocabularies to 'break down' when we attempt to assess their behaviour, this kind of cultural relativity is far less disabling.

Whatever the plural and fragmentary nature of contemporary Western societies such as the UK, they nevertheless contain few, if any, cultures whose ways of life present 'no real option for us', and great amounts of at least surface-level moral agreement across the cultural groupings who generally populate our schoolrooms. Indeed, it can be argued that it is the level of this often unnoticed level of general agreement that throws our disagreements into relief, for without it we would have difficulty understanding the very issues we were disagreeing about.¹⁶ In a very broad sense, therefore, there does exist an important level of cross-cultural moral consensus on the merits of a wide variety of virtues such as courage, honesty and kindness. The ordinary practices of schools, from discipline to the assessment of work, tend to implicitly reinforce values such as these without being parts of any acknowledged program of moral education. There will certainly be situations where our best efforts at understanding the meaning of a moral view from outside its particular cultural context will not be enough, and we may feel unable to judge confidently. This is the kind of situation we find ourselves in when addressing issues such as the extent to which school dress requirements can be relaxed to accommodate the wishes of the parents of Muslim girls (as well as the girls themselves). But such moral uncertainty is also evident within mainstream culture regarding issues such as abortion and euthanasia. In both cases

we may go about things in the right way but still not be guaranteed success. This level of recognition of cultural variance and moral pluralism need not, however, endanger a belief in the objective truth status of which moral values are capable and in their centrality to a sound education.

As we shall see, some writers have maintained that the kinds of moral consensus I have described here do not possess the kind of depth that would be required to provide a sound foundation for an education in virtue. Nevertheless, we should at least see that the issue is nowhere near as clear-cut as many cultural conservatives imagine it to be. Tate, along with many of his co-complainants, seems to be supplying a kind of ‘slippery slope’ argument in which any criticism of the idea of morality as an unchanging code (such as a set of commandments) available for unproblematic reference and enforcement by people in all cultural circumstances leads inevitably to the most facile formulations of subjectivism and relativism, and eventual amorality. It is a mistake for Tate to infer that morality not being a mere matter of personal preference in any way necessitates it being universally applicable *sub specie aeternitatis* in the way he implies. In a sense, they see Platonism and emotivism as the only alternatives, thus overlooking (amongst other things) the rather more nuanced understanding of the moral life represented by the Aristotelian tradition. This argumentative dualism is a particularly unfortunate characteristic of the popular discussion of education.

Tate’s narrow understanding of the shape moral education must take to resist the advances of relativism also exhibits a rather over-optimistic faith in the power of moral principles and their didactic inculcation to improve moral behaviour. He seems to imagine that all schools have been lacking is a series of lessons in which children are told that right’s right, wrong’s wrong, and, so to speak, that’s that. In many ways though, the problem is not so much that children do not *know* that certain ethical principles are right and demand adherence, but that they are left uncertain about what such adherence would consist in. The moral decline to which we refer may not so much be represented by a loss of belief in central moral tenets,

but by increasing threats to the integrity and judgemental abilities of the well-intentioned.¹⁷ A child may very well have been taught that honesty is good, but should he or she always tell the truth even though it could conflict with a promise of secrecy given to another? And what is the value of honesty at all if classmates can express their allegiance to this value when it is asked of them, but continue to lie as if nothing has changed? It is in answer to these sorts of quandaries that an emphasis upon the need for a renewed canonical 'set of rules, precepts and principles' proves unhelpful. This is a matter about which the kind of Aristotelian virtue-ethics I have described diverges sharply from the kinds of moral education envisaged by Tate and the American character educators. As we have seen, Aristotle does not consider virtues of character to be traits of obeying certain kinds of rule, but as the very bases of morality (of which rules are mere summations). The central place in moral education given to rules of behaviour by recent commentators suggests an overridingly conservative concern with the preservation of 'law and order' at the expense of other ideals. As David Carr suggests:

All too often this conservative perspective has inclined to fasten upon what is rigid, inflexible and superficial in our understanding and appreciation of the nature of values, ideals and principles - a kind of rules for their own sake legalism - which actually stifles independent and creative thought and enquiry and impedes real progress towards the development of genuine moral attitudes.¹⁸

It is this conservatism which perhaps best accounts for a reluctance to consider the way in which phenomena such as the prevalence of culturally relativist viewpoints in popular discourse are often regrettable yet understandable results of broader structural and political conditions. In modern societies, where the stable communities of old have been broken down by economic demands for increased mobility in the labour market and more dispersed forms of production, it is unsurprising that moral judgement becomes a more difficult task. As we become less sure of our own moral identities we are faced with more and more unfamiliar situations in which moral decisions are called for, and to many scepticism about the importance of morality may seem like the only coherent response. In embracing these

ideas, we may feel able to stress, against Tate, that morality need not be understood as an unchanging code as if written in stone, but as subject to continual and imaginative interpretation and revision as we confront new situations in life that demand a moral response. And as I have suggested in previous chapters, there is no need to think that an acceptance of this certain contingency and ‘open-endedness’ about morality should endanger our proper confidence in its centrality to a full human life and thus its educational importance. Rather, in attempting to understand the reasons why morality is increasingly seen to be under threat, we must attend to those wider processes that contribute to the erosion of its foundation in stable communities. It is the political conservatism of Tate and the American character educators that prevents them from fully acknowledging the importance of the place occupied by educational institutions within wider society, and the degree to which the nature of this social and political order impinges for good or ill upon the success of moral education - an institution which need not be considered as a mere mechanism to guarantee the continuation of the *status quo*. Tate concedes that ‘relativism cannot be dissociated from consumerism’ but sees consumerism as a mere cultural ‘fashion’, an aspect of pop culture of which we can rid ourselves by means of curricular reform. I suggest that we have good reason to doubt this optimistic view of the potential for schools to carry out all that we hope for from moral education, as well as the conservative forms many critics hope for it to assume.

In conceiving of the educational enterprise as though it were self-contained and self-referential, the writers I have discussed here depart little from the ‘intellectualist’ moral educationalists they seek to oppose. Although they differ concerning what should be taught in school, and how it should be taught, they both see the school-gates as representing the boundary of where moral education takes place. In this way, they subscribe to a view, as Tony Skillen has phrased it, “... of the child as that-which-gets-educated-at-school and of the school as that-which educates the child.”¹⁹ Although we might think of this as a largely

unproblematic conception for traditional curriculum subjects such as, say, mathematics or geography, it would seem to present an unfortunate distortion of the way in which moral knowledge and character is acquired in practice. As I have suggested when discussing the practical shape of an habituation to virtue, special lessons in the skills of reasoning can represent only a small part of the learning environment for morality (as well as only a small part of what morality *is*) when compared to the influence of, for instance, family, friends, and the popular media. The central place of these and other factors in the character formation of the young renders redundant any model of moral education which rests upon the assumption that it takes place solely in the confines of educational institutions. As Ruth Jonathan has made this point:

As moral educators, we may sincerely endeavour to give clear and consistent messages to the young, but preaching thrift in a society based on waste, teaching persistence where opportunism is admired and rewarded, encouraging commitment where the deluge of information is alienating, and fostering compassion in a social ethos which blames the victim is far from being a task whose success depends principally on the rectitude and conceptual understanding of the teacher.²⁰

It is for this reason that the response of those contemporary critics who offer the educational re-imposition of a shared moral code as the solution for moral decline seems to me so inadequate. They have a fairly clear conception of the kinds of regrettable educational practices which need to be opposed, but have struggled to break fully free from some of the other problematic assumptions which underlie them. The contributing factors to moral decline, assuming that this process is more real than apparent, will clearly be wider and more complex than those which may be controlled by alterations to the curriculum or management of schools. And moreover, the influence of these further factors may serve not only to hinder the efficacy of proposed educational solutions (in the way described by Jonathan), but even to counteract the very ideals which underlie attempts at their imposition. For example, many avowedly liberal educators see the intended promotion of autonomy *via* a neutral presentation of moral and religious alternatives as a means of

promoting the personal autonomy of those being educated. For to do otherwise would be to privilege some moral and religious alternatives over others and thus compromise a student's right to make decisions about such matters free from interference. This is an aspect of contemporary liberal educational practice which often stands accused of fostering a sense of nihilism or decisionism amongst the young. If all moral alternatives are presented as being just as good as each other, it is argued, there should be little surprise if children come to the conclusion that it does not matter what they commit themselves to, or if they choose to forego moral commitment entirely. This, of course, is very far from the intention of those earlier representatives of the liberal tradition, whose commitment to the value and fostering of autonomy was part of the articulation of a distinctly perfectionist ideal of social and moral progress - an ideal which gained its appeal from being contrasted with the social rigidities and moral heteronomy of its age. This is suggested, for instance, by these remarks of L.T. Hobhouse from 1911:

The liberal does not meet opinions which he conceives to be false with toleration, as though they did not matter. He meets them with justice, and exacts for them a fair hearing as though they mattered just as much as his own. He is always ready to put his own convictions to the proof, not because he doubts them but because he believes in them.²¹

Abstracted from some broader view of and project for society, modern neutralist pedagogy becomes less of a tool for the promotion of autonomy, and more akin to a surrender to the forces of social conditioning - forces which are certainly not uniformly of an autonomy-promoting nature. In approaching moral education, therefore, we must be careful to exaggerate neither its power to emasculate corrosive outside influences, nor the extent to which it is a mere prisoner of these influences. We must instead attempt to provide an understanding of the way in which moral education contributes an important part of the mutual development of society and individual, and of how this development may best be turned toward the good.

We might well think that the virtue-ethical tradition I have described throughout would be well-placed to encompass these sort of observations about the role of society in the moral development of the individual. Indeed, Aristotle's work in ethics is itself inextricably linked to his understanding of politics. The purpose of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was not to present some foundational account of morality, justifiable to any rational agent, but to offer advice to actual and prospective statesmen (*politikos*) about how they should properly discharge their practical responsibility for the moral education of the young. And it is central to such education (*paideia*) that it takes place within a *polis* that properly fosters those virtues arising from a shared life, and whose laws promote human flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

... to obtain a right training for goodness from an early age is a hard thing, unless one has been brought up under right laws... [I]t is not enough to have received the right upbringing and supervision in youth; they must keep on observing their regimen and accustoming themselves to it even after they are grown up; so we shall need laws to regulate these activities too, and indeed generally to cover the whole of life.²²

This emphasis upon the social and political context of moral education is by no means a theme confined to ancient thought, but one which is apparent in the work of a number of modern philosophers. As is well known, Hegel was critical of those ethical views (which he termed *Moralität*) which presented morality as something an individual could create for themselves, abstracted from the nature of the community in which they lived. Instead, he saw education as a vital part of the developmental culture (*Bildung*) of an ideal and rational ethical community (*Sittlichkeit*) - a conception notably similar to Aristotle's *polis*. More recently, Aristotelian and Hegelian themes were both evident in the work of John Dewey who stressed (in his usual obtuse style) that:

All virtues and vices are habits which incorporate objective forces. They are interactions of elements contributed by the make-up of an individual with elements supplied by the out-door world... Since habits involve the support of environing conditions, a society or some specific group of fellow-men is always accessory before and after the fact.²³

Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions, one struggles to find any detailed consideration of the social and political context of virtue in recent works on moral education, or in moral philosophy more generally. Yet if one accepts Aristotle's view upon this topic, the development of moral virtues is a process which can only properly take place in particular kinds of social setting.²⁴ To ignore this when making practical educational recommendations this would be to run a risk of potential futility. Moral education must be an integral part of a wider social and political vision, and if moral education is taken to be in need of reform, this vision must accordingly be one of transformation. The questions one is led to ask, therefore, concern the ways in which a virtue-ethical model of moral education may conflict with the theory and practice of contemporary liberalism and, if it does so conflict, the kind of transformation that is called for. An Aristotelian stress upon the breadth of influence upon the development of character already suggests some potential difficulties of this sort. One might, for instance, have to take more seriously the ways in which children come to imitate the moral lives of role-models presented to them by the media. It is not hard to foresee that cherished liberal values surrounding the issue of censorship might well be compromised here. Similar difficulties follow from the rejection of a technicist understanding of the way in which moral values are learnt in school (the idea that the teacher is a mere 'deliverer' of an ethical curriculum, rather than an ethical agent themselves). For this leads to a correspondingly increased emphasis upon the role of the teacher as an embodiment of moral virtue, worthy of emulation by those they teach, which would seem to countenance a level of interference with the private lives of teachers which conflicts with contemporary legal practice and with which a liberal may find it difficult to concur.²⁵

In what remains of this chapter, I shall consider how some recent developments in educational thought may indicate another way in which liberal societies provide a difficult context within which to situate the model I have been outlining here. And whereas the two

examples I have given above reflect some of the possible conflicts between a preferred model of moral education and certain prized liberal values, the issues that I am to consider now raise the question of whether a coherent shared program of moral education for the young of contemporary liberal societies is possible at all. And whatever their differences, this is a question concerning which Values Clarificationists, Kohlbergians, and their conservative critics exhibit little doubt.

For the last two or three decades, the concept of a 'skill' has assumed a great importance in educational debate. Prime Minister James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech of 1976 set the tone for future Government White Papers in pinning much of the blame for Britain's economic decline upon education. There was a desperate need, he argued, for a strong emphasis to be placed upon the development of those vocational skills which would be of use in the workplace. Too much schooling ignored the value of these skills, and rested content with merely filling the heads of children with knowledge. In a 1989 lecture Professor Sir Graham Hills, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde, maintained that Britain's traditional emphasis upon the acquisition of knowledge at the expense of skills was an example of intellectual snobbery of which we could well be rid. For skills "enrich in a way that knowledge does not... humanize in a way that knowledge cannot... [and] can, in stark contrast to knowledge, be the bringer of great wealth and prosperity"²⁶. Between these indicative statements, 'skills' (or more precisely 'basic', 'key', 'core' or 'generic' skills) have assumed an almost pre-eminent position in much (particularly official) educational discourse. Every educational good is now to be conceived of in terms of its positive outcomes upon the skills of its recipient.

The prevalence of skills-talk is a matter which has aroused some degree of critical ire from those who have questioned the validity of conceiving of so much of education in such terms, and the denigration of knowledge that so often seems to be carried with it. For now, however, this is not my concern. I merely want to draw attention to the way in which skills-

talk is gradually beginning to encroach upon those matters which are the concern of moral education. It is one thing, we may think, for there to be such a thing as ‘essay-writing skills’ or ‘numeracy skills’, but quite another for there to be ‘honesty skills’ or ‘practical wisdom skills’. Yet these thoughts do seem to be becoming apparent in educational literature. The vehicle for moral education allocated by the national curriculum is what is known as ‘personal and social education’ (PSE), and the curricular materials for such lessons now seem to structure learning around the acquisition of skills. For example, Macmillan’s ‘Personal and Social Education Course for Young People from 11-16+’ includes books such as *The Skills of Friendship*, and another (*Self Esteem*) which discusses “The skills involved in both accepting positive comments and handling negative feelings...”.²⁷ Even for those who are critical of much of what goes on in the name of moral education, the language of skills has had its influence. According to one recent study, for instance, the standard practice of US character-educators is to steer clear of all mention of values, and refer instead to the promotion of “life skills, workplace ‘know-how’ skills, or citizenship skills”.²⁸ In a similar vein, one of the proposals which Nicholas Tate has made as part of his attempt to re-invigorate moral education is for the establishment of a new ‘critical reasoning skills’ A-level course which will deal with issues of ethical importance.²⁹

One might at first imagine that there is much in the idea of moral skills that sits well with the virtue-ethical educational approach I have been discussing. I have, for instance, stressed the way in which the acquisition of moral values is not a purely intellectual process like learning calculus, but is matter of an habituation centred upon the experience of moral performance. Like skills, therefore, ethical knowledge is irreducibly practical. This is what Aristotle meant in separating theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), which aims at nothing beyond itself, from both the technical skill (*techne*) involved in production (*poiesis*) and the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) required for excellence in action proper (*eupraxia*). Indeed,

Aristotle relied upon an analogy between skill and virtue to introduce the notion of habituation in Book Two of his *Nicomachean Ethics*,

... the virtues we do acquire by first exercising them, just as happens in the arts. Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly, we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones.³⁰

But as we have seen in a previous chapter, even though he rests again upon this analogy when discussing practical deliberation in Book Three, Aristotle was equally concerned to point out those ways in which the possession of a skill differs importantly from a virtue of character. Although both are acquired by means of training and experience, a contrast seems to exist in the case of virtue between being a virtuous person and acting in a way a virtuous person would, whereas in the case of skill it does not. It is this distinction upon which Aristotle relies in circumventing the apparent circularity of ethical habituation in which one becomes just by performing just acts, but would need to be already just to be able to perform them. He says that “works of art [*techne*] have their merit in themselves; so it is enough for them to be turned out with a certain quality of their own.”³¹ In other words, we are only interested that the product or performance is turned out in the shape characteristic of the skill in question, so that there would be no way that someone who consistently scored high scores at archery could not be termed a skillful archer. In the case of virtue, however, we would say that it is not enough to simply perform a virtuous action as one must also be acting *from* virtue. The saving of a child from a dangerous precipice is not a fully courageous action if it is performed to avoid punishment, to display one’s athleticism, or out of ignorance of the danger (in which case it would be an example of recklessness). The reason why a virtuous action is performed must therefore be equally expressive of the virtue. Because they must be grounded in a set of these motivational propensities, we would also say that virtues are distinguishable from skills in that they are not detachable from a person’s character. They are not a set of abilities which we can use

or not use as we wish without threatening our 'ownership' of them, but are the dispositions of which our identity is comprised. It is the proper responsibility of the courageous person to consistently act in the way which courage requires, and to make sure that they are in the right emotional (i.e. fear suppressing) condition to so act.

Aristotle argued that the kinds of deliberation required for skill and for practical wisdom differ also. With the former, the deliberator proceeds with a fixed end in sight and searches for the most technically efficient means to produce this end - a process that is, in principle, articulable in terms of a set of rules. In the ethical case, however, the *phronimos* does not usually deliberate about how to achieve his or her set idea of what 'being virtuous here' is, but attempts to find out quite what it is that would best constitute virtuous action in these circumstances. For this process there is no corresponding rule-book. Much of this I have discussed in more detail earlier in this thesis, but from what I have said briefly here, it would seem that any form of moral education that proceeded in terms of the promotion of a variety of so-called 'moral skills' would be unacceptable. Moral virtues are not just things that people can do, but ways people live, and ways people are. We should surely be aiming to produce morally good people, not just people who are able to act in the manner of the morally good when it suits them to do so. Equally, despite the fact that many of the proponents of skills in education maintain that such skills are, compared to knowledge, readily transferable to all manner of different situations, it is hard to see how teaching someone *moral* skills can possibly produce these benefits. As there is no rule-book for this particular subject matter, one must rely on the ability to perceive such situations in the morally correct manner - an expression of virtue which is not just a matter of performance. As was the case with Nicholas Tate and the character-educators, the advocates of skills rely on a dualistic view which encourages their problematic conclusions. For the former, a rejection of the idea that morality is subjective and unteachable means that it must instead be understood as a code of clearly defined principles which may be transmitted into the

minds of children. For the latter, criticism of this 'theoretical knowledge' model produces the conclusion that morality must instead be a matter of the skills needed to 'process' moral information. Both approaches thus ignore the remaining alternative - that moral knowledge is neither *episteme* nor *techne*, but *phronesis*.

Why then, we might ask, should approaches which reduce virtues to skills have such an attraction in an area to which they are so unsuited? One explanation for its popularity is that it represents a movement towards coherence and uniformity in educational aims. If the value of teaching all other subjects is defined in terms of the skills that they promote then morality, if it is to be of educational importance, must similarly have its own skills to be developed. The character of such uniformity is perhaps understandable when so much of the impetus behind curricular reforms arises from the same source - business management. For those of a more cynical turn of mind, one might add that a conception of morality which emphasises performance over character, and in which the performance may spring from considerations other than the purely moral, is by no means unfitting with typical managerial concerns. And it is the influence of these concerns within education which also serve to make attractive a conception of teaching quality and inspection which grades success solely in terms of the achievement of behavioural objectives, as opposed to anything rather more difficult to quantify. Although these are perhaps some of the more obvious explanations for the encroachment of skills into the domain of moral education, it is interesting to consider a way in which this process may signify something about the possibility of this kind of education within a liberal society. May it also, therefore, be shown to have any kind of political importance?

As we have seen, from an Aristotelian viewpoint a watered down and indeterminate conception of virtue, floating freely across different concrete accounts of human flourishing, is not truly a conception of virtue at all. For without a specific understanding of the moral good for the sake of which the virtue is valued, we cannot differentiate virtuous

behaviour from externally similar performances. Yet, this is precisely the kind of conception which is at work in much of what considers itself to be virtue-theoretical work in education. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is the recent book by philosopher of education Patricia White, entitled *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society*.³² Here, White sees herself to be exploring a range of virtues which underpin and support a liberal democratic social order, amongst which she includes such worthy aspects of character as courage, hope, friendship and self-respect. In articulating the merits of these 'virtues', she does not concede that they constitute parts of any one particular, to use Rawls' term 'comprehensive'³³, account of well-being. Rather, as 'liberal virtues' they are to be seen as character-traits which are equally at home in any of the various comprehensive and reasonable accounts to be found in liberal societies, and in this way they live up to an ideal of neutrality between them (an ideal which is at the core of her understanding of liberalism).³⁴ But as I have been concerned to suggest with reference to Aristotle, it is not clear how traits which fulfill this free-floating function can at the same time adequately fulfill all of those functions required for virtues to be satisfactorily differentiated from skills when and where their verbal ascriptions remain identical. In expressing these doubts, I share the judgement of White's project offered by David Carr, who maintains that

... White (and others who have argued in this vein) hopes... to have the cake of a non virtue-theoretical liberal-democratic conception of moral and political association - but to eat it, as it were, virtue theoretically. To be precise, she wants all the benefits of conceiving such undeniably positive values... as virtues - without any of the costs of commitment to specific conceptions of human aspirations, which such dispositions as courage, honesty and hope ordinarily incur in order to warrant legitimate characterisation as moral virtues.³⁵

Perhaps the most historically important example of a debate concerning the conflation of virtue and skill was that of the denunciation of the Sophists by Socrates. Protagoras, Gorgias, and their fellow Sophists in fifth century (BC) Greece rejected the idea that there could be objective knowledge in any area. What mattered, therefore, was not the supposed

truth of any particular proposition, but rather its effectiveness. In offering themselves as paid teachers, they sought to convince their potential customers among the wealthier echelons of Greek society that they need not detain themselves with traditional educational pursuits, but concentrate upon the development of the useful skills of practical life which could bring about success. The Sophists offered themselves as expert teachers of these very skills of effectiveness, pre-eminent amongst which in the burgeoning Athenian democracy of the time was rhetoric, the power of persuasion. As the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue states;

... the others treat their pupils badly... teaching them arithmetic and astronomy and geometry and music - here he glanced at Hippias - but from me he will learn only what he has come to learn. What is that subject? The proper care of his personal affairs, so that he may best manage his own household, and also of the state's affairs, so as to become a real power in the city, both as speaker and man of action.³⁶

An interesting feature of the way in which Protagoras presents the case for teaching skills such as these, is that throughout this dialogue he continuously uses the terms *techné* and *arete* as synonymous for his purposes. Political skill and political virtue are one and the same.³⁷ We know that Socrates (again as presented by Plato) was to insist that there existed an important distinction between these two terms in that *arete* referred specifically to an ethical quality, and that some time later Aristotle was to take a similar view. Also, we know that the pre-Socratic era saw no particular difficulty in using *techné* and *arete* interchangeably - for then the latter referred simply to 'excellence' however it was understood within a particular community, most especially to those excellences which contributed to the community's prosperity and stability, and the former to any activity that aims at some particular end. In commending excellences they did not yet make any distinction between those which are, to use A.W.H. Adkins' terms, 'competitive' (such as rhetoric) and those which are 'co-operative' (such as justice).³⁸ In this linguistic context, the otherwise puzzling assertion of Protagoras that those early Greeks who lacked political

techne were provided with it when Zeus sent them *aidos* (decency) and *dike* (justice) begins to make some sense, as these were just success-ensuring excellences like any others.³⁹

Yet in Adkins' discussion of Protagoras' exposition, he finds reason to ask whether the fact that he is "... confusing co-operative excellences with administrative and political skills" reflects "a confusion of thought prevalent at the period" or is a deliberate ploy for which Protagoras had particular motives.⁴⁰ In expressing sympathy for the latter view, he suggests that Protagoras was actually trading upon a certain ambiguity of the Greek of the period in order to appeal to as many sections of the Athenian public as possible. Poorer citizens, for instance, may have been troubled greatly by the claims of Sophists that they could provide effective and necessary political skills that only the wealthy could afford. He allays their fears by suggesting that in having already received *aidos* and *dike* (as Greek society imparts this to everyone), they also thereby possess political *techne*. This, Adkins argues, exploits both the vagueness of 'political *techne*' to include these qualities, and "... the vagueness and range of *arete* and *techne* to imply that all possess the skills and qualities which these terms are capable of denoting and commending". The result being a picture that "... anyone who was not *agathos* (virtuous) in terms of the traditional evaluation [to do with wealth and social position] would be likely to applaud".⁴¹ In other parts of his exposition, Protagoras seems to be making more effort to appeal to a different group - namely those who had grown wealthy during this period of Athenian expansion, and aspired to the political prominence traditionally reserved for certain families of the hoplite class. Especially attractive to such people would have been his suggestion that political virtue/skill is not "innate or automatic" (a matter of nature, or *phusis*) but "acquired through care and practice and instruction"⁴², which he is himself "better than average" at imparting.

As well as having its own historical interest, this ancient case mirrors strikingly the view of contemporary liberal society presented by Alasdair MacIntyre in a lecture entitled *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So*.⁴³ Here he maintains that the commonplace usage

of virtue terms in such societies is unable to provide the degree of determinacy that is required of any systematic and coherent moral standpoint. In common with the conflation of virtue and skill we see in the arguments of Protagoras, such usage provides something for everyone by creating, in Adkins' words, "a smokescreen or *captatio benevolentiae*" .⁴⁴ Like the modern educationalists I have considered in this chapter, Protagoras sells virtue 'on the cheap'. And although in one way it might appear that this is more democratic in terms of its social inclusiveness, the kind of 'moral skills' which represent the alternative to a systematic and coherent account of the virtues have implications which are far from being accordant with a democratic ideal. For MacIntyre, it is this very fact that explains the contemporary popularity of virtue concepts understood in this way, and (by implication) of the approaches to moral education which are based upon them.

Ours is a political culture deeply fragmented by fundamental moral disagreements. It is also a political culture whose public rhetoric is well-designed to disguise and to conceal the extent of that disagreement by invoking an idiom of consensus with regard to values. In order to function effectively that rhetoric must be able to make use of sentences which both command widespread assent, and yet which are at the same time available for the expression of sets of quite different and incompatible moral judgements... Thus a large and largely unnoticed gap exists between the nature and grounds of those ascriptions of the virtues which figure so notably in commonplace usage and public political rhetoric, and those verbally similar ascriptions which give expression to some systematic and coherent account of the virtues. And this gap functions so as to protect from scrutiny the presentation of self in contemporary public and political life of those holding and aspiring to public office. For what our contemporary political culture requires from those who claim public and political authority is an appearance of virtue congruent with the rhetoric of shared values. And both that appearance and that rhetoric are well-served by the indeterminacy of the virtue-concepts of contemporary commonplace usage.⁴⁵

Accounts of the kind provided by both Nicholas Tate and Patricia White would therefore seem to share the failings of moral skills talk in mistakenly presupposing the existence of a substantive language of virtue which can function as the basis for a revitalised national programme of moral education. Earlier in this chapter, I criticised Tate for working with an ill-defined notion of relativism to serve as a 'straw-man' counterpoint for his own educational prescriptions. I suggested that there was a considerable amount of available

ground between the poles of radical subjectivism and an absolutist belief in the existence of a realm of universal moral principles - ground filled by an important amount of moral agreement about the relative worth of many virtues across different groups in a plural society. Yet if MacIntyre is to be believed, this level of apparent agreement is a purely verbal chimera, fulfilling none of the functions required of a coherent understanding of virtue concepts. For him, the morally fragmented nature of contemporary liberal societies means that any shared program of moral education, let alone one explicitly based around the virtues, must be rationally indefensible. In a sense therefore, he would agree with the criticisms offered by Lawrence Kohlberg of those who see the promotion of virtues of character as being at the core of moral education. For he agreed that moral disagreement was the stumbling block for these claims, as "... the problem is not only that a virtue like honesty may not be high in everyone's bag, but that my definition of honesty may not be yours".⁴⁶ If such education is to possess a determinate and substantive moral content it would have to take place within the context of a coherent ethical tradition, and this is most definitely not what contemporary liberal society represents. The attempts by recent figures to renew moral education simply by discovering a teachable moral code upon which we can all agree are therefore doomed to failure. Theirs is political language which is, to use the words of George Orwell, "... designed to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind".⁴⁷ Liberal moral education is little other than a delusive education in rhetoric.

Of course, whereas Kohlberg saw moral diversity as necessarily invalidating a virtue-based approach, MacIntyre sees the fact that the virtues sit unhappily within plural liberal societies as a good reason to doubt the merits of this kind of social order. These, of course, are rather drastic conclusions, and many of us will not want to share with MacIntyre the view that we are living through a "new dark ages"⁴⁸, where "rival and mutually antagonistic accounts of the virtues require as their social counterpart rival and mutually antagonistic institutionalized modes of moral education".⁴⁹ Indeed, many of those who have

begun to advocate a return to virtue-ethical models of moral education may disagree with both MacIntyre and Kohlberg, and remain hopeful that there is no necessary contradiction between their preferred pedagogic practices and the core values of liberal society. In doing so they would attempt to show that MacIntyre has severely exaggerated the degree to which contemporary liberal societies are best characterised as a mess of fragmented and competing moral positions. Actually, they maintain, such societies possess important and substantial levels of moral agreement that goes beyond the merely verbal to the extent that it is sufficient to support a coherent account of the virtues underlying liberal social and political orders. Indeed, this has become a live issue of interest within contemporary political theory, and a number of writers have begun to introduce Aristotelian themes in their work whilst firmly denying MacIntyre's pessimistic prognosis.⁵⁰

Rebutting MacIntyre's challenge in a rather different way, other contemporary liberals have resisted the idea that a resuscitated Aristotelianism should impinge in any way upon the politics of societies which are so fundamentally different in their nature from the Athenian *polis*. The function of contemporary political authorities should only be to pursue those policies which can be justified to all those citizens holding reasonable understandings of the good life. We may have good reasons to prefer an Aristotelian mode of moral education for our children, but these reasons simply cannot be *political* ones. This is because they form part of a comprehensive moral view, commitment to which should not be part of the justifications offered by a liberal state for the character of its public policy. As contemporary societies are characterised by the variety of often conflicting conceptions of the good held by their citizens, this circumscription is necessary for the state to be able to justify its decisions on the most fundamental matters similarly to all.⁵¹ In this way, they offer a negative response to a question asked by the philosopher of education, Robert Nash; "is it possible to adapt Aristotle's ethics to our own time without a socially destructive splitting off into self-contained "communities of virtue?"⁵² In the remaining chapters I shall

attempt, by means of a consideration of the work of both MacIntyre and various theorists of a more liberal bent, to discover what hopes we may have of being able to reply to this query in the affirmative.

¹ Carey, G Speech to London Institute of Education. Reported in *The Guardian* April 11 1997.

² Tate, N 'Education for Adult Life: Spiritual and Moral Aspects of the Curriculum' SCAA Conference Address, January 15 1996.

³ Damon, W and Colby, A 'Education and Moral Commitment' in *Journal of Moral Education* vol. 25, no. 1, 1996.

⁴ Tobin, B 'An Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* vol. 23 no. 2 1989; Carr, D *Educating the Virtues* (1990, London, Routledge); Crittenden, P *Learning to be Moral: Philosophical Thoughts About Moral Development* (1990, London, Humanities Press International); Sandin, R *The Rehabilitation of Virtue: Foundations of Moral Education* (1992, New York, Praeger); Putnam, D 'The Primacy of Virtue in Children's Moral Development' in *Journal of Moral Education* vol. 24 no. 2 1995; Nash, RJ *Answering the Virtuecrats: A Moral Conversation on Character Education* (1997, New York, Teacher's College Press).

⁵ This *particularist* criticism of principle-based ethical theories is found in its most fully worked out form in the work of Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Dancy, as well as in articles by John McDowell and David Wiggins. Cf. Nussbaum, M *Love's Knowledge* *op. cit.*; Dancy, J *Moral Reasons* *op. cit.*; McDowell, J 'Virtue and Reason' *op. cit.*; Wiggins, D 'Deliberation and Practical Reason' *op. cit.*

⁶ Most obviously the so-called 'care' virtues such as love, friendship and sympathy. See (in addition to Gilligan *op. cit.*) Michael Stocker's seminal article 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' *op. cit.* for a lucid discussion of this issue, as well as Jonathan Dancy's 'Caring About Justice' *op. cit.*

⁷ Excellent discussions of this process are contained within Sherman, N *The Fabric of Character* *op. cit.* ch. 5, and Broadie, S *Ethics with Aristotle* *op. cit.* pp. 103-110. See also Burnyeat, M 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good' *op. cit.*, and Tobin, B 'An Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' *op. cit.*

⁸ Bennett, W *Moral Literacy and the Formation of Character* (1986, Address to the Manhattan Institute, New York); Lickona, T *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (1991, New York, Bantam); Kilpatrick, W *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong: Moral Illiteracy and the Case for Character Education* (1992, New York, Simon and Schuster); Ryan, K and Lickona, T *Character Development in Schools and Beyond* (1992, Washington DC, Council for Research in Values and Philosophy); Wynne, E and Ryan, K *Reclaiming our Schools: A Handbook on Teaching Character, Academics and Discipline* (1993, New York, Maxwell Macmillan International), Huffman, H *Developing a Character Education Program: One School District's Experience* (1994, Alexandria VA, Character Education Partnership); Lickona, T 'Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education' in *Journal of Moral Education* vol. 25 no. 1 1996 pp. 93-100. National organisations such as the Character Education Partnership and the Character Counts Coalition also work to promote these educational recommendations.

⁹ Bennett, W *ibid.* pp. 2-3. Although Bennett rose to renown under Ronald Reagan's presidential administration, and many have seen his educational recommendations as symptomatic of the new-right's dominance in that period, the idea of character education has continued to garner political support. Most notably, President Clinton used his 1996 State of the Union Address to '... challenge all our school's to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship.' As quoted in Lockwood, AT *Character Education: Controversy and Consensus* (1997, Thousand Oaks CA, Corwin Press) p. 3.

¹⁰ Hoggart, R *The Way We Live Now* (1995, London, Chatto and Windus).

¹¹ Phillips, M *All Must Have Prizes* (1996, London, Little Brown).

¹² Tate, N 'Friends, Subjects, Citizens...' in *The Guardian* September 5 1995.

¹³ Tate, N 'Education for Adult Life: Spiritual and Moral Aspects of the Curriculum' *op. cit.* p. 5.

¹⁴ Although it would be equally difficult, on this view, to justify opposition to this kind of practice, for such a position cannot, of course, be objectively superior to any alternative.

- 15 This view is Mal Leicester's in her 'Multicultural Curriculum or Anti-Racist Education: Denying the Gulf' in *Multicultural Teaching*, vol. 4 no. 2 1986. Cf. Gardner, P 'Propositional Attitudes and Multicultural Education or Believing Others Are Mistaken' in Horton, J (ed.) *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* (1993, Basingstoke, Macmillan) and Phillips, DZ 'Not in Front of the Children' in his *Interventions in Ethics* (1994, Basingstoke, Macmillan).
- 16 This line of argument is particularly associated with the work of Donald Davidson. Cf. 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (1984, Oxford, OUP).
- 17 Cf. Rorty, AO 'The Social and Political Sources of Akrasia' in *Ethics* 107 1997 pp. 644-657.
- 18 Carr, D 'Moral Values and the Teacher: Beyond the Paternal and Permissive' *op. cit.* p. 196.
- 19 Skillen, T 'Can Virtue Be Taught - Especially These Days?' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* vol. 31 no. 3 1997 p. 379.
- 20 Jonathan, R 'Education, Philosophy of Education and the Fragmentation of Value' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* vol. 27 no. 2 1993 p. 123.
- 21 Hobhouse, L.T. 'Liberalism' in *Liberalism and Other Writings* (1994, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 61.
- 22 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* trans. by Thomson, JAK *op. cit.* 1179b31 - 1180a4.
- 23 Dewey, J 'Human Nature and Conduct' in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924* vol. 14 Boydston, JA (ed.) (1988, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press) p. 16.
- 24 In a recent article, Lawrence Blum has discussed six possible links between the ideas of virtue and community. These are; 'learning', 'sustaining', 'agency-constituting', 'content-providing', 'worth-conferring', 'and virtues sustaining community'. 'Virtue and Community' in Crisp, R (ed.) *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues* (1994, Oxford, Clarendon Press).
- 25 Cf. Carr, D 'Moral Values and the Teacher: Beyond the Paternal and the Permissive' *op. cit.*
- 26 Hills, G 'Put Your Money on the Doers' *Times Educational Supplement* January 20 1989 p. 15.
- 27 McConnan, S *The Skills of Friendship* (1989, London, Macmillan) and *Self Esteem* (1989, London, Macmillan).
- 28 Interview with Deborah Linden in Lockwood, A.T. *Character Education: Controversy and Consensus* *op. cit.* p. 50. Deborah Linden is the co-author of RESPECT, one of the more popular recent character education school programs in the United States.
- 29 'A-levels to place new emphasis on moral questions' *Daily Telegraph* October 28 1996 p. 3.
- 30 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* *op. cit.* 1103 a30-b3.
- 31 *Ibid.* 1105 a27-28.
- 32 White, P *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society* (1996, New York, Teachers College Press).
- 33 As Rawls defines it, a moral conception '... is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships... [It] is fully comprehensive if it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system' Rawls, J *Political Liberalism* (1993, New York, Columbia University Press) p. 13.
- 34 This reflects Rawls' recognition that political (as opposed to comprehensive) liberalism may, despite being neutral in aim, 'affirm the superiority of certain forms of moral character and encourage certain moral virtues' *ibid.* p. 194.
- 35 Carr, D 'Can There Be a Moral Psychology of Democratic and Civic Education?' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* vol. 31 no. 2 1997 p. 353.
- 36 Plato *Protagoras and Meno* trans. by Guthrie, W (1956, Harmondsworth, Penguin) 318d8-319a1. Similar views are found in *Philebus* (e.g. 58a-b) and *Gorgias* (e.g. 448).
- 37 Especially at *ibid.* 322b-323b. Cf. Sinclair, T A *History of Greek Political Thought* (1967, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 55 n. 3.
- 38 This usage is found in Adkins, A *Merit and Responsibility* (1960, Oxford, Oxford University Press) p. 6 ff. The distinction made here would seem to mirror that made by MacIntyre in his *After Virtue* *op. cit.* between what he calls the 'internal' and 'external' rewards of practices.

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- 39 *Protagoras op. cit.* 322b-c.
- 40 Adkins, A. 'Arete, Techne, Democracy and the Sophists: Protagoras 316b-328d' in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* no. 93 1973 p. 7.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Protagoras op. cit.* 323c5, 323d6.
- 43 MacIntyre, A *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So* (1991, Lancaster, Centre for the Study of Cultural Values).
- 44 Adkins, A *op. cit.* p. 12.
- 45 *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.
- 46 Kohlberg, L 'From Is to Ought: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away With It' in *Cognitive Development and Epistemology* Mischel, T (ed.) (1971, New York, Academic Press) p. 227.
- 47 Orwell, G 'Politics and the English Language' in *Collected Essays* (1961, London, Secker and Warburg).
- 48 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue* 2nd edition *op. cit.* p. 263.
- 49 MacIntyre, A *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So op. cit.* p. 9.
- 50 Macedo, S *Liberal Virtues* (1990, Oxford, Clarendon Press); Galston, W *Liberal Purposes; Goods, Virtues and Diversity in the Liberal State* (1991, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press). It must be said, however, that Macedo's recent work has become closer to that of Rawls. Cf. his 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls?' in *Ethics* 105 1995. Other forms of what we might broadly term neo-Aristotelian liberalism (in that they are comprehensive, perfectionist and evince little distaste for teleological thinking) are found in Raz, J *The Morality of Freedom* (1986, Oxford, Clarendon Press) and *Ethics in the Public Domain op. cit.*; Nussbaum, M 'Non-Relative Virtues' in Nussbaum, M and Sen, A (eds.) *The Quality of Life* (1993, Oxford, Clarendon Press) and 'The Discernment Of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Public and Private Rationality' in her *Love's Knowledge op. cit.* pp. 54-105.
- 51 This kind of view is now almost uniformly termed 'political liberalism'. Its foremost recent support and exposition has come in the post-*Theory of Justice* essays and lectures of John Rawls (collected in his *Political Liberalism op. cit.*). Charles Larmore has also defended a similar view, combined with an Aristotelian understanding of moral judgement in his *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (1987, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press). The essays of Stuart Hampshire have also been important in presenting many of the insights that form the basis of these more fully worked-out political theories. Cf. Hampshire, S *Morality and Conflict* (1983, Oxford, Basil Blackwell).
- 52 Nash, R 'The Revival of Virtue in Educational Thinking: A Postliberal Appraisal' in *Educational Theory* vol. 38 no. 1 1988 p. 28.



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Chapter Six

Is Moral Education a Forlorn Hope?

As I have suggested in the previous chapter, there are good reasons for us to be sceptical about the arguments of many of those who have criticised the contemporary theory and practice of moral education. These arguments have rightly drawn attention to ways in which recent forms of moral education have tended to be over-reliant upon a controversially non-cognitivist and intellectualist understanding of its subject matter, and I have supported ensuing attempts to advocate the idea of character development as providing a superior theoretical foundation. Indeed, it is to contribute to such a project that most of what I have said thus far has been intended. Yet despite such areas of broad agreement, these arguments have all too often failed to consider whether or not the relationship between the practice of education and the character of wider society is one of mutual support. This is a question which is of critical importance when education is to aim at the development of moral character, a process which is especially resistant to being confined within specific institutional environments. To ignore it is to consider only part of the picture, and thus run the risk that one's recommendations are rendered futile by the adverse influence of those parts of the picture which have been allowed to recede from view. This stress upon the inextricability of education and politics is one that has a clear antecedence in Aristotelian thought, and is supported with most vehemence in contemporary philosophy by Alasdair MacIntyre.

In a previous chapter, I have discussed MacIntyre's work as part of what I have termed an 'historicist' response to those who had seemed to conceive of the questions of moral philosophy as though they were eternally unchanging, adequately comprehensible without reference to the historical context within which they were raised. In this way, I considered

him alongside Bernard Williams and Charles Taylor as providing an important critique of the kind of philosophical position that has underpinned the contemporary approaches to moral education I have been concerned to reject. It is also clear that the kinds of worries I have raised concerning the possibility of concretely instituting a theoretically preferable educational model have derived in great part from an historicist way of perceiving these issues. Given that I have now begun to consider the possibility of practically circumventing those potential problems to which I have alluded, my focus has shifted from morality to politics or at least has extended to encompass political considerations. My intention from this point on is to take the preferability of a neo-Aristotelian model of moral psychology and pedagogy as already established (however premature this may be), so that I can begin to investigate the possibility that resources exist which hold out some hope of reconciling this model with a feasible normative political theory. I freely admit that this is to follow a somewhat unusual path, as it has certainly been more conventional to consider the justification of educational practices from the standpoint of an antecedently established moral or political theory, yet it is nonetheless a path which I consider to be potentially instructive. As this will be my aim, it is appropriate here to introduce this further consideration of MacIntyre's work by situating it within the variety of political philosophy with which it is most popularly associated - 'communitarianism'.¹

Although it is something of a recurrent theme in philosophy, with roots in the ideas of such various figures as Aristotle, Vico, Hegel, Wittgenstein and Oakeshott², the connection between morality and 'community' has been stressed in recent political thought largely in response to the early 1970s reassertion of liberal theory by John Rawls in the form of his *A Theory of Justice*.³ Almost single-handedly responsible for the re-invigoration of normative political theorizing after some perhaps premature reports of its 'death', Rawls attempted to refute consequentialist theories (especially utilitarianism) by drawing upon certain aspects of Kant's moral theory. Building upon the second formulation of his categorical imperative

(roughly that we should treat other humans ‘as ends rather than as means’), he sought to assert the necessary priority of ‘the right over the good’ (and thus the deontological conception of ethics over the teleological with regard to justice). Rather than arguing for the rational superiority of a conception of justice in terms of its propensity to produce a certain end-state, Rawls attempted to structure our existing intuitions concerning ‘justice as fairness’ - the desire for social institutions that do not distribute advantages for some compared to others in a merely arbitrary way.

To this end, Rawls utilized a form of social contract theorizing that asks us to picture ourselves behind a so-called ‘veil of ignorance’, where we lack any of those morally irrelevant features of personhood that would give rise to unfairness in the making of the contract. This would include such features as our social and economic class, our ethnic background, and our particular conception of the good life. Rawls argued that rational choosers in such a situation would be able to agree upon a certain workable notion of justice, comprised of two principles arranged in lexical priority. The first principle would require a system of basic social and political liberties for all citizens which could not be overridden except in situations of extreme economic necessity. The second would ensure that social and economic inequalities would result from offices that were open to all subject to equality of opportunity *and* be justified only if they benefit the worst off.⁴ The contract would therefore have produced a conception of justice fitting a liberal egalitarian political agenda similar to that traditionally associated with the Democratic Party of the United States.

Rather than focusing upon the practical political implications of ‘justice as fairness’, the force of the communitarian critique has largely impacted upon the ontological and methodological issues where Rawls is taken to be representative of contemporary liberal theory more generally. At the most abstract level it is charged that his contractarianism provides a falsely emaciated picture of the self, stripped of all the identities, interests and

projects that ordinarily and necessarily supply it with an identity.⁵ There is perhaps no problem in imagining ourselves to be (using Michael Sandel's terms) 'unencumbered' or 'antecedently individuated', if this helped guide and structure our thinking, but to grant moral priority to such an imaginative fiction is, for communitarians, an illegitimate step beyond this. Instead of "brave naked wills", as Iris Murdoch has described the self as pictured in post-Kantian moral and political theory⁶, we are asked to see ourselves as necessarily socially implicated or embedded, incapable of being abstracted from our social and linguistic worlds to serve the demands of liberal theorizing. To use MacIntyre's words, what is being denied by communitarians is that we can in some way

... assume an abstract and artificial - perhaps even an impossible - stance, that of a rational being as such, responding to the requirements of morality not *qua* peasant or farmer or quarterback, but *qua* rational agent who has abstracted him or herself from all social particularity.⁷

Rawls' account of the self as rational ends-chooser is also seen to exemplify the 'asocial individualism' of liberal theory. Claims are here being made about both the social *origin* of our aims and self-understandings, and the necessity of their social *content*. Communitarians challenge the idea that the good life can be pursued or even understood independently of the communal practices which imbue our lives with value. We are all, they claim, in some way dependent upon our social setting for our capacity to live meaningful lives. Many of the goods that we might wish to pursue are incapable of being understood as constellations of individual preferences or interests - rather, they are irreducibly communal. This applies not only to those values often thought to be in conflict with liberal modernity, such as patriotism or aristocratic honour, but also to core liberal values themselves. Autonomy, for instance, is claimed to depend not only upon the state keeping out of people's lives, but also upon the existence of meaningful social options, and traditions which stress the importance of critical thought. In emphasizing the value of individual autonomy without acknowledging its social presuppositions, liberal theorists stand accused of offering a picture of modern

society as “citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection”.⁸ In doing so they risk endangering the continuation of the social practices to which liberals standardly attach value.⁹

Another common claim of the communitarian critique is that liberalism rests upon a sceptical or subjectivist view of ‘the good’.¹⁰ If there are no rational grounds enabling the state to favour any one conception over another, prioritizing the freedom of the individual to follow their own particular vision of the good life can seem to be the only legitimate political response. This would appear to be an important foundation for demands for state neutrality, whereby, in Rawlsian terminology, liberal justice would rest upon the ‘thinnest’ possible conception of the good, so as to be fair to ‘thicker’ conceptions between which preferences are not justifiable. For the state to rely on controversial conceptions of the good which are not shared by all citizens when making its decisions is to subject a proportion of its citizens to unjustifiable coercion. Of course, not all such ‘anti-perfectionist’ arguments are premised upon moral scepticism or subjectivism. For many liberal theorists, it is only by strictly adhering to neutrality of aim and procedure that the state can accommodate the demands made by the morally fragmented nature of contemporary societies - what Rawls calls the “fact of pluralism”.¹¹ Here, the threat of civil strife outweighs the attractions of state policy based upon a particular moral view, even when this view is nevertheless held to be universally applicable.

Other liberals defend neutrality as a means for the furtherance of other values. Will Kymlicka, for instance, has claimed that state neutrality can be seen as a means by which civil society is given the room it needs to flourish and foster valuable lives.¹² Yet whatever way the regulative ideal of neutrality is defended, communitarians, and indeed certain liberals¹³, have continued to describe it as either or both unachievable and/or undesirable. Impossible in that a neutral state cannot remain neutral when considering the wishes of those who would challenge the core aims which justify its existence¹⁴, and undesirable if it

disallows the kind of perfectionist political decisions which are required to foster values that are seen as more important than the procedural value of neutrality itself. Once again, this latter claim can be made on behalf of values which are distinctively liberal (such as freedom or autonomy) as well as those more characteristically associated with anti-liberal critique.

In the next chapter I shall give some more sustained attention to the ways in which liberal theorists may respond, or have responded, to these communitarian challenges. As these criticisms of liberalism largely mirror those I have made of recent forms of moral education, there is perhaps good reason to imagine that the best responses may go some way to answering the question that has motivated my discussion of these issues. That is to say, what kind of political theory is best able practically to accommodate a virtue-ethical model of moral education in contemporary societies? But before turning to the plausibility of broadly liberal answers to this question, I should turn first to the communitarian arguments themselves, for it is towards this viewpoint that the reflections of the last chapter were leading us.

Despite the large degree of similarity in their attacks upon liberal theory and practice, the ambiguity of communitarianism as a normative political force is exhibited both in the reluctance of the central theorists to engage in political advocacy, and in the marked differences in what is produced when this is attempted. Some (notably Taylor and Walzer) seem to envisage a kind of 'super-liberalism' where the individualist and sceptical tendencies of modern society are corrected to encourage the development of its communal goods within a generally autonomy and diversity-fostering environment. Others, of whom MacIntyre is the most prominent representative, wholly reject these amendatory intentions and argue that it is not simply the shortcomings of liberal theory that require correction, but the socially pathological state of liberal modernity *in toto*, within which any idea of shared communal goods is, and can only be, a fiction. More radical changes would be needed if

these goods are to exist at all. What, then, are the consequences of this most extreme position? Is all hope lost?

As we have seen already, MacIntyre is suspicious of any argument for a return to an ethics of virtue (and its associated form of moral education) that does not take full account of its necessary embodiment in the institutional forms of the wider society. And when we consider the characteristic social, political and economic forms of modernity, these seem very far from the realities of any historical example of societies which fostered the virtues as he presents them.¹⁵ Taken together with his view that the traditional 'metaphysical biology' of Aristotle's teleological account of proper human functioning is invalidated by scientific developments, this would seem to provide little room for anything other than pessimism about the possibility of a revival of the virtues. As he himself asks; "if we reject the biology, as we must, is there any way in which that teleology can be preserved?"¹⁶ Yet despite his continuous tone of regret for the passing of an era in which moral language could play a truly meaningful part in our lives, MacIntyre's recent work has begun to point towards ways in which teleology, and its concomitant ethics of virtue, could perhaps be profitably re-invigorated in the modern age. Although *After Virtue* offered only doom-laden prognoses of the modern condition, it was in this work that the central conceptual categories of such a re-construction were identified. These categories being; 'practice', 'narrative', and 'tradition'. Concerning the first of these, MacIntyre explains,

... by a practice I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.¹⁷

Thus, for example, the activity of kicking a football skillfully is not in itself a practice but the game of football is, and planting turnips is not a practice but farming is.¹⁸ Practices contain internal, shared goods, not only in the value of what is produced but also in those

excellences which sustain that good-producing practice (such as courage or self-control). These goods and excellences are such that they cannot be understood or experienced outside of developed engagement with specific practices. This is what differentiates them from external goods, such as glory or financial reward, which are not practice-bound in this sense. It is those dispositions which represent excellence in the achievement of internal goods that ground MacIntyre's account of the virtues. An education in virtue, therefore, will follow the general procedure laid down by Aristotle of introducing children to the kinds of activity which offer the opportunity for their character to be systematically shaped and extended by the experience of acting in ways which are characteristic of the fully virtuous person. This is experience found only within the context of practices focused upon the pursuit of goods which are internal to them, where these practices subject the desires and preferences of the initiate to the authoritative standards which define their activity.¹⁹

Those other forms of education which restrict themselves to pedagogical techniques which do not involve participation in actual 'living' practices (in the hope, perhaps, of not pre-determining a child's choice of which practices are valuable and which are not²⁰), will succeed only in introducing children to those objects which can be adequately comprehended in a non practice-specific way - in other words, to external goods. It is this kind of educational practice which is unable to initiate children into what Aristotle thought was the realm of mature ethical choice (*prohairesis*), and which is today fostered in the endemic cause of 'skills'. Moral skills, if we recall, are qualities which share certain aspects of virtues in the full sense, but which do not constitutively involve the shape of one's character. As such, they do not make such heavy and politically controversial demands upon moral education. For education, in search of neutrality, to remain outside of the variety of modes of commitment available to children thus unavoidably favours one particular conception of the good life - that of a life free from commitments not chosen according to one's own reflective desires as constituted at the time of choice. And if the

intentional shaping of these desires remains beyond the remit of education, there is no way in which it may aspire to a similarly intentional education of the virtues as opposed to skills.

Nonetheless, It is clear that we are all engaged in more than one activity that may satisfactorily be described as a practice, and that there is a distinct possibility that the requirements of these may conflict. The virtues of one's life as an artist or soldier, for instance may not always fit too harmoniously with the duties of being a good and virtuous parent. It is precisely this consideration which underlies much of the reluctance for education to foster and encourage participation within certain practices amongst others. But although MacIntyre is willing to embrace what he considers to be the Sophoclean insight about the existence of irresolvable tragic conflicts, he suggests that many of these apparent difficulties resolve themselves once the engagement in practices is viewed correctly in the context of the unity of one's life as a whole. Just as any human experience or action is most intelligible as part of a temporal sequence which extends into both past and future, the good life has the form of a narrative, an unfolding story oriented as a 'quest' to find the nature of the good life.²¹ This narrative conception of life adds further virtues to those required in and for practices as 'one needs a more general form of courage and temperance to enable one to withstand the dangers and temptations besetting one's life as a whole; one needs wisdom and judgement, integrity, constancy and patience'.²² Once the question "What am I to do?" is seen as integrally connected to the question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"²³ the problem of choice amongst the demands of variant practices loses its air of arbitrariness. The narrative of a unified life provides the teleological framework which is required for these choices to aspire to rational justification. Those dilemmas in which a clear answer seems unavailable between the claims of two conflicting goods will be like this because they are tragic, not because our incoherent moral culture has rendered them irresolvable.

Lastly, MacIntyre stresses how the roles and practices, engagement in which constitutes the narrative unity of a life, depend for their existence upon an institutional and communal embeddedness in the traditions of thought and action which lie behind them. For “we all approach our circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity... [This] constitutes the given of my life, my moral starting point” .²⁴ And just as practices and narrative lives both allow for and require distinct human goods and virtues, these traditions rest upon qualities which ensure their own continuation. So, for instance, a tradition such as the game of football requires not only the existence of the game as a practice, but also those means (both intellectual and institutional) by which particular examples of the practice are given a wider context (we might think of the existence of leagues, historical records of results and championships, and means by which the game is taught), and by which it is transferred and developed across generations. Without all of this, it may be possible to kick a ball into a net or to someone else, but it will no longer be possible to ‘score a hat-trick’ or assume the role of ‘midfield playmaker’. And, more centrally, it will not be possible to achieve those kinds of internal goods and virtues which rest upon these tradition-fostered concepts and roles.

The importance for education that MacIntyre attaches to the social context provided for practices by tradition is exemplified in his 1985 lecture entitled *The Idea of an Educated Public*.²⁵ Here, he describes teachers as “the forlorn hope of the culture of Western modernity” entrusted with a mission which is “both essential and impossible” .²⁶ This is because the two major purposes we require them to serve - to teach children to think for themselves, and to fit them for a role in society requiring recruits - are mutually incompatible. And, as we might expect from MacIntyre, this regrettable condition is not the result of any philosophical necessity, but is produced by an historical characteristic separating post-Enlightenment Western societies from earlier, more morally coherent, cultures.

What modernity excludes is the possibility of the existence of an educated public; and... it is only where an educated public exists, and where introduction into the membership of that educated public is the goal of education, that both the overall purposes presupposed in modern education systems can be realized.²⁷

It is improper, on this account, to advocate educational aims without considering whether or not there exists the culture and institutions required for their social embodiment. Where the tradition presupposed by educational proposals has fallen into decay, these proposals can be little more than futile. This is the problem which, for MacIntyre, besets contemporary education. Among the consequences of the so-called Enlightenment project, he claims, is that our culture now lacks the resources for securing rational agreement “on what it would be relevant and important for members of a contemporary educational public to share in the way of belief, in the way of perspective, in the way of debate”.²⁸ Because this sort of consensus is essential to provide a framework within which the kind of debates and disagreements which define a tradition can take place, its absence has meant that thinking has gradually become the preserve of specialists and professionals. The kind of educated public which MacIntyre describes as existing within the culture of eighteenth century Scotland has simply crumbled away. Thus, contemporary controversy between advocates of a broad and reflective ‘liberal education’ and their ‘vocationalist’ opponents becomes an example of the kind of disagreement which MacIntyre thinks has been rendered unavailable for rational conclusion. It is only when the life of the reflective thinker is itself a kind of vocation, that these two aims may be reconciled. In the absence of an educated public, this “ghost haunting our educational systems”²⁹, such a reconciliation remains beyond our means.

The position in which we find ourselves is not one that permits easy solutions. MacIntyre is very clear that his argument is not a call for the recreation of an educated public. This is a concept which has “no way of taking on life in contemporary society”.³⁰ Any attempt made to resuscitate those educational curricula which had in the past served such a public, would

simply ignore the extent to which these intellectual traditions have been assaulted by the very same processes which are responsible for the disappearance of the public itself. Moral philosophy, for instance, no longer serves to articulate the debates concerning some specific tradition, but has been remade as a professionalised discourse, existing abstractly above all social and traditional specificities. In such a guise, its re-introduction to a more 'humanized' curriculum could do little to return us to those social and cultural conditions which were themselves responsible for moral philosophy being something else entirely. The same judgement must also be passed upon those contemporary commentators who propose broadly Aristotelian curricular reform as an answer for our moral malaises. For they are arguing against the background of cultures in which practices, and with them the morality of virtues, have been consigned to the margins. And in ignoring the way in which their proposals are rendered futile by these conditions, they merit equally MacIntyre's characterisation of the so-called Frankfurt School of critical theorists, as "... unwittingly collaborating as a chorus in the theatre of the present".³¹

With the hope that politics or education could deliver us from the problems of our contemporary condition extinguished, MacIntyre's argument seems at this point little other than a counsel of despair. Indeed, all *After Virtue* can offer to save us from the "new dark ages" is that "what matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained".³² And even if this recommendation were to appeal to us, a more fundamental problem besets this book's advocacy of the Aristotelian virtue-ethical tradition. For how can MacIntyre make this case when his argument rests upon the assumption that appeals to standards (whether of rationality or morality) outside of all traditions are appeals made to fictions? Either this is true and the rational superiority of Aristotelianism cannot be demonstrated to the members of other traditions or none (which is what, he stresses, most of us are), or his defence of this particular tradition buys advocacy at the expense of theoretical consistency. The choice,

therefore, seems to be between a disabling relativism, and a universalism which would contravene the very claims supporting his condemnation of post-Enlightenment moral philosophy. A later postscript to *After Virtue*, however, sees MacIntyre concede that this is a problem and respond by outlining a mode of historicism which will supposedly allow the rational superiority of one tradition over another to be exhibited without positing the existence of eternal and objective standards overarching all traditions. This is to be judged

... in the ability of one particular moral-philosophy-articulating-the-claims-of-a-particular-morality to identify and to transcend the limitations of its rival or rivals, limitations which can be - although may not always have been - identified by the rational standards to which the protagonists of the rival morality are committed by their allegiance to it, that the superiority of that particular moral philosophy and that particular morality emerges.³³

By means of such encounters, MacIntyre claims that the adherents of certain traditions are rationally justified in thinking that they subscribe to the “best theory so far”.³⁴ Further in the postscript we are told that although an historicist defence of Aristotelianism may “strike some critics as a paradoxical as well as Quixotic enterprise”³⁵, this is what he intends to provide in the successor volume to *After Virtue*. Yet by the time *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* was published in 1988 it was clear that the nature of MacIntyre’s project had altered somewhat. The most marked change being that his previous rather general commitment to Aristotelian teleology had developed into an argument from the avowedly Christian perspective of Thomism (the tradition based upon St Thomas Aquinas’s fusion of Augustinian and Aristotelian world-views). This is consequent upon the book’s “...outline narrative history of three traditions of enquiry (these being Augustinianism, Aristotelianism, and the Enlightenment rationalism of David Hume) into what practical rationality is, and what justice is, and in addition an acknowledgement of a need for the writing of a fourth history, that of liberalism”.³⁶ Central to this project is MacIntyre’s account of the nature of a rational tradition (of which there may be many, there no longer being a simple dichotomy between tradition and modernity *per se*) which is composed of a stress upon the coherent

and searching character of thought, and the common features which allow this to continue (most especially the existence of shared conceptual frameworks, and ideas of what the central problem of the tradition is). Canonical texts, and their authoritative interpretations, are in this way essential to the development and survival of any rational tradition. To be rational does not depend upon an ability to argue from some kind of neutral, independent ground (an assumption MacIntyre attributes to liberal thought), because “progress in rationality is achieved only from a point of view.”³⁷ Thus,

... to be rational is to see the world from the right institutional standpoint, and to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice ... from within some particular tradition in conversation, cooperation and conflict with those who inhabit the same tradition.³⁸

The development of traditions begins from the “condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitutes a given”.³⁹ As time goes on, the tradition will be revised continually and reformulated in order to cope with conceptual and textual uncertainties and to meet the challenges that arise from new situations. The continuation of the shared beliefs and allegiances constitutive of the tradition is aided by the institutionalisation of those virtues required in its central methods of enquiry, which enable it to meet most adequately the challenges it may face. By being constantly pushed towards areas of internal problematic, the tradition is best able to overcome the onset of an ‘epistemological crisis’, when its intellectual resources are tested to their breaking points, and the tradition ceases to make rational progress. Only radical new theories which can explain the previous impasse are able to prevent the tradition from dying. A tradition which had shielded itself from areas of internal problematic would find that its resources for meeting such a challenge had withered and would thus founder. In this way, MacIntyre attempts to show how his re-formulation of virtue ethics can be clearly distinguished (both theoretically and pragmatically) from any reactionary moralism which enforces ‘rules for their own sake’, and sees reflective thought as a dangerous practice to be

discouraged. Only a tradition alive with debate and opportunities for critique can hope to be fully resilient.

Continuing this project, a defence of Thomism as the tradition best equipped to account for the failures and inconsistencies of its rivals (and thus most justified in regarding itself as the ‘best theory so far’) is contained in MacIntyre’s 1988 Gifford Lectures, subsequently published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Here he discusses the conceptions of moral enquiry that are embraced within the traditions of Encyclopaedia (this being the Enlightenment reason of the Scottish thinkers largely responsible for the Ninth Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica), Nietzschean ‘genealogy’, and Thomism (represented by the Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter of 1879, *Aeterni Patris*). Once more rejecting any notion of tradition-independent standards against which these largely incommensurable conceptions can be judged (a mistaken belief that constitutes the main failure of the ‘Encyclopaedists’), MacIntyre maintains that arguments from the context of the tradition-constituted learning that is central to his own Thomism are best able to account for the failures of its rivals. The replacement of tradition by Enlightenment rationalism as an objective means of appeal for academic conflict (exemplified by Adam Gifford’s request for his lecturers to “treat their subject [natural theology and the foundation of ethics] as a strictly natural science ... just as astronomy or chemistry is”⁴⁰) foundered with the destruction of the educated public that made this appeal possible. Similarly, attempts at rational progress made from a Nietzschean perspective are undermined by that tradition’s nihilistic incompatibility with the institutionalisation of the means of academic moral enquiry that are essential for such progress.

One of the notable features of this later work is that MacIntyre’s pessimism appears diminished, or at least he is now rather less resistant to utopianism.⁴¹ In moving from rather vain hopes for a renewal of neo-Aristotelianism (as in *After Virtue*), to an apparent embrace of some sort of pluralistic contest of traditions, he evidently feels that he has supplied the

means by which his own Thomism can demonstrate its rational superiority over rival world-views. On this account, moral education will consist of “a number of rival and conflicting programs, each from the standpoint of one specific contending view” whereby “the adherents of each viewpoint will have to provide for the education of their own young from their own point of view”.⁴² MacIntyre’s own preferred tradition of pedagogy would proceed in line with an Aristotelian model, informed by the insights of St Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae* and the Thomistic concept of *synderesis* (man’s natural appreciation of the precepts of natural law), whereby censorship and indoctrination provide the means of initiation into “the key systematic controversies between the various competing rival standpoints”.⁴³ Only when someone is tutored to a certain level can their own critical freedom be relevant to the ideal of rational progress. “What we grasp initially in understanding the binding force the precepts of the natural law are the conditions for entering a community in which we may discover what further specifications our good has to be given”.⁴⁴

At the uppermost levels of moral education or moral enquiry, MacIntyre’s account necessitates the rejection of any notion of the university as an arena within which any and all moral traditions can be given room to make rational progress. This vision, he argues, derives from the Encyclopaedic faith that rational consensus amongst all rational persons can be obtained *via* unconstrained debate. Even if this fideism does not have the adherents it once had, it is still embodied in the institutional form of the contemporary university which, he claims, effectively renders impossible any kind of progress in rational enquiry at all. For such progress to be made possible, we must recognise his tradition-centred understanding of rationality, and reconceive the university as a place of constrained disagreement within the context of a shared traditional framework that drives enquiry into the most rationally profitable areas. They would thereby become

... places where conceptions of and standards of rational justification are elaborated, put to work in the detailed practices of enquiry, and themselves rationally evaluated... not an arena for conflict in which the most fundamental type of moral and theological disagreement was accorded recognition.⁴⁵

This vision dispenses with any notion of the university as a place for free, tradition-neutral learning, and rests upon re-introduction of the kind of belief requirements for admission and appointment that underpinned the profitably consensual nature of their preliberal precursors. It was thus, MacIntyre believes, that “Cleghorn was rightly preferred to Hume for the chair in moral philosophy at Edinburgh.”⁴⁶ Only the clash of rival traditions in the form of academic debate between the best representatives of their respective universities can give new impetus to the rational moral enquiries that have for so long been emaciated by the imposed fictions of the Enlightenment. These proposals would indicate that the pessimism of *After Virtue* has been somewhat tempered with the provision of a coherent vision of education in contemporary society. MacIntyre now seems to believe that he can display the rational superiority of this vision without having to rely upon a metaphysically problematic account (such as he finds in Aristotle) of the universal functional character of the virtues which underlie it. He has focused upon the way in which virtue ethics must be relative to their institutional embodiment within various traditions, without being forced to concede that there is therefore no way in which any one form of embodiment can be said to be rationally inferior or superior to another. MacIntyre would appear to have avoided the pitfalls of relativism (which would have scuppered any attempt to distinguish an education based upon virtues from one that merely cements dominant social mores), without having to rely, as many of today’s conservative ‘character educators’ do, upon an overly monistic view of the nature of human flourishing. Yet despite these attractions, I still see good reason to doubt whether MacIntyre has fully resolved his difficult relationship with the pluralism of modern societies. In the critical account I will present in the remainder of this chapter it is this issue of pluralism (in all its senses) that will figure most heavily.

Let us consider, first of all, MacIntyre's most central conceptual category - that of the *practice*. For it is this concept which does most of the work involved in grounding an Aristotelian understanding of the virtues within a reasonable account of our social lives. How then does the institution of education relate to this vital conceptual category? Some commentators, such as John and Patricia White, have expressed sympathy for some of MacIntyre's educational views, maintaining that a consequence would be that "... the liberal division between equipping pupils to choose a life-plan and moral education will be replaced by something more unitary".⁴⁷ The replacement would see moral education based not upon abstract classroom exercises but upon participation in practices. Virtues would be learnt *via* the experience of the shared goods that such practices sustain. Children would not be discouraged from choosing a certain way of life for fear that it would hamper their autonomy or the extent of subsequent choice, but would be actively encouraged to involve themselves in practices through which their moral education in the virtues of cooperative activity could take place. The value of moral education is thus essentially that of introducing children to practices within the context of a particular tradition. This is an understanding of the development of virtue which largely mirrors that I have provided earlier in this chapter.

Yet although it is undeniable that one of the functions of the institution of education is that it prepares the ground for children to enter into a life of participation within practices, I fear that this portrayal is not entirely accurate. For one thing is it unclear on the account provided by the Whites exactly what type of practice or, indeed, how many different practices children should be introduced to for the purpose of virtue development. This is not merely a complaint that we are not provided with this information, but that the nature of their account in actual fact precludes its provision. For despite the attraction the Whites see in MacIntyre's vision, they remain essentially wedded to a broadly liberal political theory which is unable to countenance the kinds of restrictions of choice (in the modern rather than Aristotelian sense) that the vision necessitates. What they have seen beyond is the idea that

the educational safeguarding of children's autonomy requires that concrete moral practices be considered only in abstraction. Teachers should not *discourage* children from participating in a particular practice for the fear that their future choices may be prejudiced by the experience for this would preclude virtue being developed at all. The Whites would still be unable to accept, however, that the participatory experiences from which children get their taste of the virtues which surround the achievement of internal goods should form part of a deliberate curriculum imposed by the representatives of some particular tradition and aimed at the replication of their own 'bag of virtues'. Their praise is for a brand of MacIntyre 'lite' which is unable to form a part of the wider scheme of MacIntyre's critique of modern liberalism.⁴⁸

The other problem with this account of a MacIntyrean education is that it would make the contribution of education to the development of virtue merely instrumental. The value of the school would be gauged in terms of the effectiveness of its means of introducing children to practices - education becoming purely a means to this end. Throughout his work, MacIntyre has been resistant to this idea and has consistently maintained that the aim of education is intrinsic to the activity itself. In his 1964 article *Against Utilitarianism*, for instance, he argued that the aim of education

... ought to be to help people to discover activities whose ends are not outside themselves; and it happens to be of the nature of all intellectual enquiry that in and for itself it provides just such activity. The critical ability which ought to be the fruit of education serves nothing directly except for itself, no one except those who exercise it.⁴⁹

It is this same view which is carried forward into his most recent work. His vision of the post-liberal university as a participant in a systematic debate between the representatives of different traditions of thought is heavily dependent upon the educational system being weighted towards the provision of initiates to this most testing of intellectual arena. For it is only if rational enquiry serves as the motor of the educational system that can we be

confident that the debate at university level is really performing the function which MacIntyre requires of it, and not merely something similar but less significant in terms of his account of the epistemological justification of traditions. Only by ordering its educational institutions so as to foster this intrinsic aim at the expense of any competing considerations can a tradition hope to meet the criteria for success and survival he has laid down in his defence of his theory against charges of relativism.

Yet just as MacIntyre's views on the issue of educational aims seem little altered from his earlier article to his most recent work, I would argue that one of the main difficulties of the latter is just as recognisable in the former. For it is notable that the argument from *Against Utilitarianism* which I have cited above is very open to criticisms of equivocation.

MacIntyre has inferred that the furtherance of intellectual enquiry is the sole aim of education solely from the premise that education should have a non-instrumental end in itself. Why, one might ask, can we not accept the very same premise but identify a different intrinsic aim of education, or claim that intellectual enquiry is only one amongst a package of intrinsic aims? In his later work, essentially the same problem is encountered once we return to the question of how education is related to the concept of a practice.

If education should not be understood as a mere method of introduction to practices (where virtue is *really* taught), but actually possesses its own internal good, as MacIntyre claims, it surely takes on the character of a practice itself. This conclusion is supported by MacIntyre's recent stress, in reply to Charles Taylor's claim that there are goods and virtues which exist independently of practices, that the notion is rather more exhaustive than many have thought. Practices, he states, are not merely certain types of craft in a narrow sense (such as is represented by his oft-mentioned fishing crew), but also "the shared making and sustaining of the types of community within which the common good can be achieved - families, farming households ..., local forms of political community".⁵⁰ It would

seem strange in this context to think that education or educational institutions could not also be thought of in this way.

Yet if we are to understand education itself in terms of a practice, this surely runs into conflict with his identification of the furtherance of intellectual enquiry as its sole aim. If it is possible to make a case for the existence of shared goods and virtues specific and internal to the practice of education that differ from (and perhaps even conflict with) the promotion of intellectual enquiry, his argument begins to have difficulties. If enquiry is not the sole aim of education then the academic conflict of traditions cannot be guaranteed to supply sure evidence of rational superiority (thus re-introducing the spectre of relativism), and if education is denied the status of a practice then it is beholden to instrumentalist accounts of its value which would serve to make MacIntyre's grounding of the virtues in practices seem rather haphazard. Only a harmony between these two ideas can support his educational proposals (and indeed his wider theoretical schema).

Even if one were to accept the argument that education must have intrinsic aim(s), and that the promotion of intellectual enquiry is at least one amongst these, it would be difficult to deny the claim that there exist additional goods which are equally or also intrinsic to the practice of education. For example, in MacIntyre's scheme where progress towards the ideal of rational superiority is the dominant aim, it would not seem to matter how much time such progress took as long as it aided the ultimate success of the tradition of which it formed a part. This, however, would be to ignore the merits of what we might call *timeliness* - the urgency of an educational practice. Education is not just an abstract process leading towards general developments of rationality, but is also an institutional activity for which limited resources are most often focussed upon a relatively short and specific period of the lives of those being educated. The virtues of education involve doing the right thing at the right moment, and it is this aspect which MacIntyre appears to overlook in his concern to safeguard the wider justification of his theorising.

The possible conflicts within the practice of education which are ignored by MacIntyre are not missing, according to a recent article by Amelie Rorty, from the thought of Aristotle.⁵¹ As she claims,

Even in the best of states, under the best of conditions, the ideal Aristotelian educator is pulled in a number of different directions, to fulfill radically different aims whose relative priority is constantly in question... These tensions do not indicate cracks and flaws in Aristotle's theory; on the contrary, they reveal his proper sensitivity to the complexities and tensions within the phenomena themselves. He can - as many commentators press him to do - reconcile these tensions at a formulaic and abstract level of theory construction; but he recognises - as many of his commentators do not - that such general principles do not by themselves resolve the dilemmas of the politician and the educator.⁵²

The main areas of tension identified by Rorty concern questions of whether education should aim at the development of each individual or at the general aims of the *polis* (we might place our concern over timeliness under this category), whether it should promote the life of contemplative wisdom or that of civic excellence, and where the boundaries should be drawn between the education of the free citizen, capable of *prohairetic* choice, and the education provided for those he considered unsuited to self-rule. The account of the purpose of education provided by MacIntyre answers questions such as these in terms of its one overriding concern - the promotion of intellectual enquiry. If this necessitates the sublimation of the needs of the individual to the requirements of his or her tradition, or a devotion of attention to the most intellectually promising students, then so be it.

The extent to which MacIntyre's understanding of Aristotle is at odds with Amelie Rorty's is evident in the account he provides in Chapter Eight of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Under the heading of "Aristotle on Practical Rationality", he offers an interpretation which explicitly denies that Aristotle could have countenanced any notion that there exist conflicts of the kind she describes which were beyond rational resolution - "the apparent and tragic conflict of right with right arises from the inadequacies of reason, not from the character of moral reality".⁵³ To this extent, MacIntyre does not essentially depart from Rorty's

interpretation as she is merely concerned to amplify Aristotle's recognition of the complexity of educational practice, not to claim that it was beyond the abilities of the *phronimos* to resolve such conflicts and choose correctly. Where MacIntyre does move beyond her interpretation, however, is in his insistence that the choices of the *phronimos* will presuppose his or her prior identification of some ultimate end. "The deliberative task of rational construction is then one which issues in an hierarchical ordering of means to their ends, in which the ultimate end is specified in a formulation which provides the first principle or principles from which are deduced statements of those subordinate ends which are means to the ultimate end."⁵⁴

It is difficult to imagine a clearer statement of what I have referred to in previous chapters as a 'blueprint' or 'grand end' view of Aristotle's writings on the nature of practical deliberation. The nature of this controversial interpretation marks a move on behalf of MacIntyre away from the 'open-endedness' of *After Virtue* (where the good life for man, the *summum bonum*, was identified as a 'quest' for answers to the question of 'what is the good life for man?'), towards a rather more determinate vision. It is this movement that is at the heart of what we could describe as MacIntyre's newly found non-pessimistic self. In his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* we see the fullest evidence of his vision in an account of St Thomas' work (and the Thomistic tradition) to which he confirms his own allegiance.

In this work, MacIntyre presents an overall picture of how, on the Thomistic view, the moral practice of what he likes to term the 'plain person' is essentially integrated with the moral enquiry that has as its *telos* ("some conception of the finally completed work"⁵⁵) the discovery of an account of *eudaimonia* for all human beings. Moral enquiry is a craft which exists to perfect moral practice as

...every moral agent no matter how plain a person is at least an incipient theorist, and the practical knowledge of the mature good person has a crucial theoretical component; it is for this reason that Aristotle and Aquinas agree that we study

philosophical ethics; not only for theoretical goals but so as to ourselves become good.⁵⁶

and furthermore,

... the moral life is the life of embodied moral enquiry and those individuals who live out the moral life as farmers, or fishermen or furniture-makers embody more or less adequately in those lives, devoted in key part to their own crafts, what may often not be recognised as a theory, the product of the theorists very different craft, but which nevertheless is one.⁵⁷

MacIntyre's embrace of the kind of 'blueprint' view in which moral practice presupposes some more or less determinate theoretical picture of its *telos* seems to stem largely from a fear of the kind of arbitrariness with which he charges both post-Enlightenment thought and the moral practice of contemporary societies. In rejecting what he sees as the ambitious cosmology, the 'metaphysical biology', of Aristotle's function argument, MacIntyre does not rest content with the thought that there may actually be no sense in the idea of the 'blueprint' or 'grand end' (as claimed by McDowell, Wiggins and other writers I have discussed previously) but instead seeks to find some alternative but no less (and indeed rather more) determinate candidate for this position. As Charles Larmore has contended:

His master argument supposes that we can ensure the objectivity of some moral belief, not if we simply justify it contextually by reference to others held constant, but only if we can show that *as a whole* they get us from untutored human nature to some extramoral *telos*.⁵⁸

This serves to illustrate how MacIntyre's problem with the idea that there may exist plural and irreconcilable sources of value within a practice, stems from a wider problem with the idea that there may exist plural and irreconcilable sources of value *per se*. Although *After Virtue* praised Sophocles' insight into the true nature of moral tragedy as well as recognising the open-ended nature of the human *telos*, both of these claims have receded from MacIntyre's more recent, avowedly Christian work. Now, within MacIntyre's meta-traditional scheme, it is only *via* a belief in a single good of education (intellectual enquiry)

serving a single and determinate account of the human good that a moral tradition may hope to achieve rational justification. The avoidance of a crippling arbitrariness *presupposes* these strictures on our understanding of *eudaimonia* and the nature of an educational practice.

It is as part of this 'quest' that St Thomas and his concept of *synderesis* becomes so central. In the philosophy of St Thomas, the role of *synderesis* is to supply an analogy in the moral case to the role of *nous* in theoretical science. It allows for the apprehension of the ends of deliberation, which enables proper and virtuous deliberation to take place. This, we should note, goes beyond the place I have attributed in a previous chapter to something called *phronesis-nous* in Aristotle, which concerns itself with the discerning appreciation of the particulars within each context of moral judgement. MacIntyre does not go so far as to impute the presence of *synderesis* to the thought of Aristotle, but he is keen to emphasise those elements of his writing which emphasise a strong degree of theoretical continuity between the two philosophers.

My approach thus far has been rather different, and has sought to focus upon a kind of Aristotelian scholarship which rejects the model of deliberation and (ultimately) moral justification which MacIntyre is so concerned to promote. I will not return to the detail of this kind of interpretation here, but would maintain that an allegiance to a broadly Aristotelian understanding of moral virtue and deliberation (and the education which is intended to promote it) is in no way threatened by a belief in either the *autonomy*⁵⁹ or *plurality*⁶⁰ of morality. This is a belief which does not seek to replace a cosmological foundation for the teleology of virtue ethics with a theological alternative, but instead seeks to redefine expectations of what it is for this kind of moral viewpoint to be justified and quite what it is we are hoping to justify. In this context, we should not feel corralled by MacIntyre's dire warnings that any notion of education being a discrete and sovereign practice⁶¹ with plural goods of its own must somehow lead to the abandonment of rationality

in our moral thought and practice. Rather, we will understand the particular natures of both education and morality rather better - as complex forms of thought and action for which there is no available and comprehensible blueprint of their perfected natures ready to be applied in situations of practical choice.

Before leaving the issue of pluralism in MacIntyre's work, it is important to note how his arguments for an increasingly monistic view of human flourishing and educational practice also now rest upon a pragmatic acceptance of a broader social or political pluralism as an instrumental means of effecting rational progress of enquiry. This pluralism, which concerns the intellectual and institutional environment in which the rationality of traditions can be put to the test, cannot be a merely temporary measure as the necessity of contest provides the only consistent guarantor of the motivation for traditions to develop their own intellectual and critical resources. Equally, MacIntyre's championing of syncretic projects such as that undertaken by St Thomas would indicate that the co-existence of a number of different competing traditions could hold a further kind of promise.

Yet it is notable that MacIntyre has little or nothing to say about how this pluralistic arena is to be maintained beyond a possible victory on the part of one of his 'competitors'. Are we to suppose that it is a natural state that does not require any supra-traditional politics in order to preserve the pluralistic institutional order? If this kind of politics is required, how are we, on MacIntyre's account, to comprehend the *practice* that it is (and its concomitant goods and virtues) when it exists outside of all tradition? For all that MacIntyre castigates the fractured nature of contemporary moral thought and practice, his entire scheme of epistemological justification would seem to rest upon the permanent existence of this fracturing. His attitude to moral pluralism is in this way inescapably Janus-faced, the continued existence of 'sin' becoming our only sure route to salvation. In the light of this, should we not ask whether the original 'pull' of MacIntyre's argument - that the moral

disagreements of the modern age were a source of regret - has lost much of its original power?

Even if one were to be generous to MacIntyre's schema and allow for the unproblematically continued existence of competing moral traditions, it still seems far from guaranteed that this would provide the sure motor of rational justification and progress he describes. For just as his desire to see a system of moral beliefs justified *in toto* seems to betray a particularly modern anxiety in the face of disagreement, this modern anxiety would also potentially infect the very traditions he wishes to see compete for justification. In describing his hope (in the final chapter of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*) for an intellectual environment whereby the University of Paris of 1272 (as a highpoint of Thomism) could battle with the 1968 University of Vincennes (as a respective highpoint of Nietzscheanism), he avoids the problems resulting from the fact that such a situation could only result from a self-conscious act of recovery of past institutional and intellectual forms by their contemporary sympathisers.

For how certain can we be that these acts of renewal, motivated by a self-conscious dissatisfaction with certain features of the modern age, will not unavoidably infect the traditions with this very self-consciousness? If we are to agree with Bernard Williams' contention that there is "no route back from reflectiveness"⁶², we would have very great reason to doubt that this certainty could be maintained reasonably. This infection would be most problematical when a tradition is not new and conceptually open-ended but is a renewal of an older tradition with clearly defined intellectual limits. In the case of such a renewal it is not clear that its continuation would be seen to stem from the 'legitimate' means of developing the tradition's intellectual capacity to cope with challenge. It is very possible that when challenges approach which are known to have previously proved fatal to the tradition, a cynical shielding from such problems would appear to be the most efficient defence.

These doubts about the faith that MacIntyre shows in the unanimity of traditions, and my stress upon the dangers of the elitist education which he advocates, serve to make his particular variety of communitarianism less and less attractive. Without any guarantees of the impetus to rationality, innocence and loyalty that MacIntyre thinks are inevitably engendered by his tradition-based pluralism, his arguments take on the character of either naive optimism or a confidence trick. Perhaps he now believes that faith in God supplies these guarantees which will enable us accept his account of an education in the virtues. He has, of course, not provided any arguments as to why we should accept his appeal to the 'final guarantor' to be morally binding. If in the end it all comes down to faith, it does not appear that we have travelled very far away from our initial pessimism. For us unbelievers it is hard to see how MacIntyre's golden age could be recovered in an undistorted form, and this is perhaps no bad thing.

¹ This is, however, a notoriously controversial epithet as most of those writers who have been deemed communitarian have been reluctant to embrace this label. MacIntyre, for instance, has remarked that 'contemporary communitarians' are those 'from whom I have strongly disassociated myself whenever I have had the opportunity to do so' ('Reply to My Critics' in Horton, J and Mendus, S *After MacIntyre* (1994, Oxford, Polity Press) p. 302. A similar statement is to be found in MacIntyre, A 'I'm Not a Communitarian But...' in *The Responsive Community* 1991 vol. 1 no. 3 pp. 91-2). The term would seem to be embraced more readily in fields such as social policy studies (especially by Amatai Etzioni and his admirers), although Daniel Bell, the author of a recent work of political theory, has become perhaps the first such writer to refer to himself explicitly as a communitarian. Bell, D *Communitarianism and its Critics* (1993, Oxford, Oxford University Press).

² Stephen Holmes has referred polemically (and somewhat idiosyncratically) to similarities between contemporary communitarians and a number of fascist writers (notably Giovanni Gentile, Charles Maurras and Carl Schmitt). Holmes, S *The Anatomy of Anti-Liberalism* (1993, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press) p. xiii.

³ Rawls, J *A Theory of Justice* (1971, Oxford, Clarendon). The central texts of the communitarian response are: Sandel, M *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) and *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (1996, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press); Walzer, M *Spheres of Justice* (1983, New York, Basic Books) and *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press); Taylor, C *Philosophical Papers Vol. II* (1985, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) and *Sources of the Self* (1990, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); MacIntyre, A *After Virtue* (1984, London, Duckworth), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988, London, Duckworth) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990, London, Duckworth). Although less centred upon considerations of Rawls, the works of Roberto Mangabeira Unger and the social critic Christopher Lasch are also important. Cf. Unger, R *Knowledge and Politics* (1975, New York, Free Press) and Lasch, C *The Culture of Narcissism* (1991, New York, Norton).

⁴ Contractors are thus assumed to act rationally in preferring a 'maximin' strategy which produces the best result from the worst situation. Critics within the liberal tradition such as Brian Barry and Thomas Scanlon have questioned the accuracy of Rawls' expectations of contractual rationality. Cf. Barry, B *Theories of Justice* (1989, Hemel Hempstead, University of California Press); Scanlon, T 'Contractualism and Utilitarianism' in Sen, A and Williams, B (eds.) *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (1982, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

However, such critiques are unlike those offered by the 'communitarian' writers, in that they express broad agreement with contractarian methodology in general.

- 5 This concern is most especially associated with Michael Sandel's work.
- 6 Murdoch, I 'Against Dryness : A Polemical Sketch' in Hauerwas, S and MacIntyre, A (eds.) *Revisions : Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (1983, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press) p. 46.
- 7 MacIntyre, A 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' *The Lindley Lecture* (1984, Lawrence KA, University of Kansas) p. 12.
- 8 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p.156.
- 9 This line of critique is particularly associated with Charles Taylor. See especially his 'Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate' in Rosenblum, N (ed.) *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (1989, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press) pp. 159-182.
- 10 It is notable that Rawls seems careful to avoid taking a particular stand on the meta-ethical status of moral judgements, as this would be to intervene in debates he considers to be beyond the proper remit of his 'political liberalism'. Bruce Ackerman is perhaps the contemporary writer most commonly associated with a sceptical defence of liberalism. Cf. *Social Justice and the Liberal State* (1980, New Haven, Yale University Press). The origins of liberalism as a *modus vivendi* to cope with the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also rested heavily upon sceptical argument.
- 11 Rawls, J *Political Liberalism op. cit.* p. 63.
- 12 Kymlicka, W 'Liberal Individualism and Liberal Neutrality' in *Ethics* vol. xcix 1989.
- 13 Raz, J *The Morality of Freedom op. cit.* Galston, W *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues and Diversity in the Liberal State op. cit.*
- 14 The US court cases of *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* and *Mozert vs. Hawkins County* are seen by many writers to present exemplary illustrations of what is involved in this problem. See for instance, Macedo, S 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God vs. John Rawls' *op. cit.*; Burt, S 'In Defence of *Yoder*: Parental Authority and the Public Schools' in Shapiro, I and Hardin, R (eds.) *NOMOS XXXVIII: Political Order* (1996, New York, New York University Press) pp. 412-37.
- 15 For a more sanguine view of these transformations, see Schneewind, J 'The Misfortunes of Virtue' in *Ethics* 101 1990 pp. 42-63.
- 16 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 162.
- 17 *Ibid.* p. 175.
- 18 He also states that whilst bricklaying is not a practice, architecture is. This does seem a rather more questionable assertion when farming, fishing and portraiture are all accorded practice status. *Ibid.* p. 187. Cf. Putnam, D 'The Intellectual Bias of Virtue Ethics' in *Philosophy* 72 1997 pp. 303-311.
- 19 This is not to say that that once acquired *via* apprenticeship within practices, virtues cannot then be exercised in other arena. *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 191.
- 20 Or indeed, whether the goods found in practices are to be valued at all.
- 21 *Ibid.* p. 204.
- 22 White, J and White, P 'Education, Liberalism and the Human Good' in Cooper, D (ed.) *Values, Mind and Education* (1990, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 60.
- 23 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 216.
- 24 *Ibid.* pp. 204-5.
- 25 MacIntyre, A 'The Idea of an Educated Public' in Haydon, G (ed.) *Education and Values: The Richard Peters Lectures* (1987, London, Institute of Education) pp. 15-36.
- 26 *Ibid.* p. 16.
- 27 *Ibid.* p. 17. MacIntyre identifies the three basic conditions for the existence of an educated public. Firstly, 'there must be a tolerably large body of individuals, educated into both the habit and the opportunity of active rational debate, to whose verdict appeal is being made by intellectual protagonists'. Secondly, these individuals must exhibit 'shared assent, both to the standards by appeal to which the success or failure of any particular thesis or argument is to be judged, and to the form of rational justification from which those standards derive their

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- authority' and, lastly, participate in (and share beliefs and attitudes consequent upon) 'the widespread reading of texts which are accorded a canonical status within that particular community'. *Ibid.* pp. 18-19.
- 28 *Ibid.* p. 28.
- 29 *Ibid.* p. 34.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 MacIntyre, A *After Virtue op. cit.* p. 31.
- 32 *Ibid.* p. 263.
- 33 *Ibid.* p. 269.
- 34 *Ibid.* p. 277.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Lukes, S *Moral Conflict and Politics op. cit.* p. 255.
- 37 MacIntyre, A *Whose Justice? Which Rationality? op. cit.* p. 337.
- 38 *Ibid.* p. 350.
- 39 *Ibid.* p. 354.
- 40 MacIntyre, A *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry op. cit.* p. 9.
- 41 When utopianism is understood as a corrective to 'those men and women of affairs who pride themselves upon their pragmatic realism, who look for immediate results... They are the enemies of the incalculable, the sceptics about all expectations which outrun what *they* take to be hard evidence, the deliberately shortsighted who congratulate themselves upon the limits of their vision.' *ibid.* p. 234.
- 42 MacIntyre, A *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So op. cit.* p. 15.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 MacIntyre, A *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry op. cit.* p. 136.
- 45 *Ibid.* pp. 222, 231.
- 46 *Ibid.* p. 224.
- 47 White, J and White, P in Cooper, D (ed.) *op. cit.* p. 156.
- 48 This is essentially the same line of criticism I applied to Patricia White's subsequent book (*Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society op. cit.*) in the preceding chapter of this thesis.
- 49 MacIntyre, A 'Against Utilitarianism' in Hollins, T (ed.) *Aims of Education: The Philosophic Approach* (1964, Manchester, University of Manchester Press).
- 50 MacIntyre, A 'A Reply to my Critics' in Horton, J and Mendus, S (eds.) *After MacIntyre* (1994, London, Routledge) p. 288. This response was made to Charles Talyor's argument in his 'Justice After Virtue' in the same volume.
- 51 Rorty, AO 'Moral Imperialism vs. Moral Conflict: Conflicting Aims of Education' in Lapsley, D and Clark Power, F (eds.) *The Challenge of Pluralism: Education, Politics and Values* (1992, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press) pp. 33-51.
- 52 *Ibid.* p. 35.
- 53 MacIntyre, A *Whose Justice? Which Rationality? op. cit.* p. 142.
- 54 *Ibid.* p. 132.
- 55 MacIntyre, A *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry op. cit.* p. 64.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 175.
- 57 *Ibid.* p. 80. Statements of a similar kind are to be found on pages 62, 63, 128, 136, 137, 142.
- 58 Larmore, C *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (1987, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 28.

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- ⁵⁹ This being understood as the thought that morality does not have any extra-moral foundation with which to justify itself. A central claim of Kant, this view is now being interpreted in recent work as part of Aristotle's ethics. See especially McDowell, J 'Deliberation and Moral Development' *op. cit.* for this claim.
- ⁶⁰ There is a great deal of critical controversy surrounding the question of whether Aristotle was willing to accept the existence of irresolvable moral conflict. For instance, MacIntyre, Charles Larmore and Stuart Hampshire think not, while John McDowell, Martha Nussbaum and Ronald Beiner take a contrary view.
- ⁶¹ A recent work by the Irish philosopher of education, Padraig Hogan, develops a fascinating argument defending the idea of education as a 'sovereign practice', centring upon the 'courtship' rather than the 'custody' of experience and sensibility. On his interpretation, the major philosophical foundation for this view is to be found in what we know of the educational practice (rather than the thought) of the historical Socrates - soon to be eclipsed by the 'custodianship' of Plato and the remainder of dominant Western philosophy (including Aristotle). Hogan, P *The Custody and Courtship of Experience: Western Education in Philosophical Perspective* (1995, Dublin, The Columba Press).
- ⁶² Williams, B *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* *op. cit.* p. 63.



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Chapter Seven

A Liberal Home for Virtue

In the second part of this thesis I have been investigating the relationship between moral education and political theory. Although I have at no point claimed that the account of the nature of morality and of an education for moral judgement advocated in the first part of the thesis is in any sense complete, I believe that this arguably premature shift in focus does possess some justification. For as we investigated the educational implications of an understanding of morality based upon an account of the virtues, it became increasingly clear that these implications could not be fully appreciated without the provision of some further account of the compatibility of this educational vision with the wider social and political character of the societies for which the vision was thought appropriate. In the last two chapters I have explored a position at one extreme of the continuum of possible responses to this, maintained with most philosophical sophistication by Alasdair MacIntyre. This position involves the claim that there is a hopeless incompatibility between the social and political context of liberal modernity and, on the other hand, an education in virtue conceived in a recognisably neo-Aristotelian form. The somewhat negative conclusions I have drawn about MacIntyre's view have held out the promise that there may be some way in which we can hope to retain certain of the broadly liberal values we were wary of conceding to MacIntyre on the altar of his religiously imbued and rather restrictive understanding of a virtue-based moral order. But as we shall see in this concluding chapter, there are a great number of ways in which we may look to achieve this reconciliation depending to a large degree on what values or procedures we see to be at the core of the liberalism we wish to preserve.

Before turning to the main tasks of this concluding chapter, however, I should first reaffirm some of the caveats that have circumscribed my project here. As I have made clear in

previous chapters, my discussion of the extent of this compatibility - of how far contemporary society is able to provide a suitable context for the proper development of virtue - has departed from the conventional manner of approaching this topic. For I have not sought to draw upon or justify some broad account of the proper activities of the state in political society and to extrapolate from that to justify a form of education which is fitting to the necessities and limitations of state action which the account prescribes. Instead, I have taken the development of moral virtue to be our core concern and have looked to political thought to provide us with an understanding of how we might realistically hope for a society which is able to provide a suitable home for that development to proceed in the way I have described in the first part of the thesis. This is a method for which I have claimed greater antecedence in Aristotle's general approach to politics and ethics than in any modern or contemporary thought. In many ways, of course, this delimits my project in such a way that neither political theory nor moral pedagogy is advocated to the extent it might be, for I have been concerned mostly with the nature of their interrelationship. Yet this should not in any way be understood to imply that I would take a mere coherence between politics and pedagogy to be any indication of the value of either - merely that the lack of such coherence should be seen as a greater failing than it might otherwise have been. To this extent I am certainly arguing, at least implicitly by the pragmatics of my methodology, that education should not be seen as a mere instrument of our political ideals.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I shall continue to investigate certain aspects of political thought through, as it were, the 'lens' of education. We know that an Aristotelian conception of the development of virtue (*ethismos*) carries with it certain requirements of the wider social and political context within which it is to take place. There must exist some degree of common understanding of the good for which virtue is exercised for in the absence of this we would have no way of, amongst other things, differentiating those who have been habituated to true virtue from those who have merely learnt to imitate virtue. It is

the question of whether this kind of common understanding exists, and if so to what extent, that is at the heart of our investigation of the practical promise of an Aristotelian vision of moral education that seemed set to offer a valuable alternative to the educational views that have predominated in the second half of this century.

We have already assessed certain non-liberal ways of answering this question. For many conservative critics of contemporary culture and educational practice the answer resides in the re-imposition of a set of guiding principles that they see as universally applicable to virtually any social contexts. For these writers, the last few decades have witnessed a wavering from this true path into a regrettable state of fractious diversity - a state that has been fostered by the errors of late twentieth century educational practices. But just as education bears most of the blame for inducing this state, it is also seen by these writers as our great source of hope for correcting the ills of our contemporary society. This correction can be effected by a return to methods of education which prioritise the inculcation of a determinate moral code over any fashionable but misguided efforts to promote the autonomy or individuality of those being educated. The moral consensus we are looking for is therefore something available for unproblematic (re-) imposition through the medium of education.¹

At the other end of the scale, however, we have seen that Alasdair MacIntyre understands education to be not the 'great hope' of Western modernity, but rather its 'forlorn hope'. This is because he understands modern societies to be so morally fragmented that educational institutions are actually incapable of performing the culturally restorative role we require of them. The set of core principles identified by the conservative critics as our potential cure are, for MacIntyre, a mere imaginative fiction - the moral counterparts of social practices and institutions which we are unable to recover from history. Instead, we must recognise that liberal modernity itself precludes the existence of any coherent shared programme of moral education. This being so, we are forced to relinquish our faith in one

of these two ideals. Whilst many (such as the advocates of Values Clarification) have been willing to make this choice by denigrating any efforts at the replication of moral values as an unjustifiable and illiberal enterprise, MacIntyre follows the alternate path by maintaining that the claims of virtue necessitate the complete rejection of liberal modernity.

One of the central thrusts of my argument so far has been that the problems facing any attempt to institute this 'coherent and shared programme of moral education', based upon a virtue-ethical understanding of morality, are neither as simple nor as insuperable as these viewpoints encourage us to think. It is certainly rather unrealistic to believe, as many cultural conservatives seem to, that education can do all the work necessary to rid us of all the social ills that periodically give rise to popular concern over the moral values of our culture. Even if we were to grant that the social ills are more real than apparent, our institutions of formal education (schools, colleges and universities) will and should have only part responsibility for the task of moral development. We tend to think it only right and proper that much of this responsibility is left to the family or to the various positive learning experiences which take place outside of formal education. Equally, even where other social forces are less benign than those described here, and perhaps greatly harmful to the development of virtue, it is often hard to see how we might be able to insulate the process of moral development from these forces without greatly infringing individual liberty. If we are to grant the importance of the wider nature of political society to the sustenance of moral development, but do not wish to follow MacIntyre in his belief that liberalism cannot provide a home for virtue properly understood, we will have to pay great attention to how we should understand the various responsibilities and limitations which should properly govern public authority in these areas of life. And as we shall see, the responsibilities and limitations that are prescribed by different conceptions of liberalism and the role that moral education (and education more generally) has to play within it, will be understood largely in terms of a number of core concepts which are at the heart of any such

project. It will be the role and value given to such varied concepts as democracy, liberty, equality, autonomy, governmental legitimacy, and parental rights of guardianship which will largely define any coherent attempt to justify an education in virtue within a liberal political order.

As we saw in the first part of this thesis, it is certainly true that an Aristotelian understanding of virtue and its development is greatly at odds with many approaches to moral education which we would see to be part of the liberal tradition. At its heart, any Aristotelian understanding will have a number of common features. It will hold the proper aim and responsibility of educators to be the promotion of the well-being or *eudaimonia* of those under their charge. This responsibility will be discharged by educators in working to shape the character of their charges in such a manner that they become able to discern and act on account of objectively valuable reasons for action. The discernment involved here will not be confined to a narrowly intellectual process such as that involved in recalling historical facts or drawing logical connections, but will constitutively involve the operation of educated sentiments and emotions. It will, nonetheless, be a rational activity. The increasing experience of the moral learner in choosing their course of action on account of the appropriate reasons for action will be assisted both by the measured (but often inculcatory) interventions of the educator and by the character of the social practices and political order within which these practical choices are being made. These factors will combine to produce a developmental process towards the attainment of virtuous character such as that exemplified by those moral agents whose lives provide us with the best exemplification of what well-being comprises.

This understanding is thereby committed to a number of philosophical positions which are alien to much of what we understand as liberal views concerning politics and education. Notable amongst these positions are, variously: (1) that there exists some rationally defensible notion of the good-life for persons to be promoted by political and educational

activity; (2) that moral values are more than just subjective impositions of our will, but are objectively available (in the practical form of reasons for action) for human discernment; (3) that these reasons for action are too complex and context-dependent to be derived from or summated by any set of moral principles (however large); (4) that a certain kind of upbringing is required for the development of the virtue of practical wisdom (of which ethical discernment forms a part); (5) that this upbringing will involve the conscious shaping of educable sentiments and emotions; (6) that the development of virtue will require the involvement of the learner in social practices and the associated inculcation of beliefs and attitudes that have not, at this stage, been freely chosen by the learner herself; and (7) that the development of virtue may best be (or, more strongly, can only be) effected by those who are themselves virtuous.

As we have seen throughout this thesis, the approaches to moral education which have conventionally been thought to be most fitting to liberalism have tended to be associated with contrary positions concerning many of these claims. These are: (1) that no form of life can be claimed to be more appropriate for humans than any other - the good-life being, if it is anything, that which is freely chosen by individuals in line with their own preferences properly constrained only by certain limitations imposed by duties to others; (2) that no overwhelmingly convincing case can be made for the rational availability of objective moral values; (3) that becoming an educated moral agent involves being able to justify one's moral decisions according to some logically coherent set of moral principles; (4) that moral agency does not require the possession of a certain set of character traits; (5) that moral education should develop a rational understanding of moral issues and the nature of moral decision-making free from the clouding effects of emotional responses; (6) that moral educators must not indoctrinate learners with beliefs and attitudes which they have not been able to choose for themselves (and connectedly, that political authorities should not permit or foster any such inculcation); and (7) that a moral educator's fulfillment of the

responsibilities of their technical practice is not essentially related to the private matter of their own moral character and way of life.

Of course these are not necessary and/or sufficient claims for all liberal theories of moral education. Most such theories would depart from at least one or two of these. Of those we have considered, Values Clarification would seem to hold to all six whilst Kohlberg's neo-Kantian thought is at least ambivalent with regard to (2). Nevertheless, this schematic presentation does at least indicate some of the issues which will be at the heart of any essential conflict claimed to exist between liberal and Aristotelian understandings of moral education. Although certain theories have indeed rejected all of the Aristotelian claims as irredeemably illiberal, we will now try to see how one might hope to reconcile a degree of commitment to the kind of Aristotelian view sketched here with some coherent defence of a recognisably liberal values in politics and education. But not only this, we shall also need to satisfy ourselves that this reconciliation is rather more than mere *toleration* but actually involves some coherent integration between political and educational thought. Any number of theories may maintain, for a variety of reasons, that it is not appropriate for governments to rule out entirely the efforts of those who seek to educate in the Aristotelian manner. It might be thought, for instance, that although a Kohlbergian pedagogy was to be preferred in general, it was more important for governments to respect the rights of parents to choose the way in which their children are educated (especially concerning controversial topics such as morality or religion). Even if the rights of parental guardianship were not believed to extend so far a liberal might feel that overruling the choices of parents in such areas was to endanger the precarious stability of a liberal state. Nevertheless, such justifications of toleration will not suffice for our current task if they are provided in the context of overwhelming social forces which serve to make the provision of a coherent education in the virtues (as we have understood them) a near impossible task. For a political theory to truly take the claims of virtue seriously it must attend to its entire range of sources -

extending from formal education to include the political culture, the family and the various so-called intermediate associations of civil society, existing between these two domains.²

Some of the objections to the Aristotelian positions described here can perhaps be seen best as little more than conventional counterparts of liberal thought. Others might also be interpreted as rejections of certain elaborations of Aristotelian ideas rather than of the core concepts. To see how we may be able to smooth over some of the conflict which we may expect let us consider the first of the positions I have presented, concerning the idea of the 'good life'. As we know, Aristotle understood there be to a determinate end for which human beings are by their nature suited, and which all humans have an interest in seeking. This he termed *eudaimonia* - a word that is now conventionally translated as 'well-being' (rather than the more traditionally common 'happiness') - and is comprised of a life lived in accordance with virtue. To many liberal ears, the idea that there is a particular kind of life which humans should lead and which educators and politicians should encourage them to lead sounds immediately offensive. It brings to mind a snobbish and totalitarian picture of human perfection to which all of us, in our infinite variety, are to be expected or even forced to conform. Liberalism, one might argue, should oppose any such view in the name of freedom and diversity - allowing all individuals the opportunity to lead the life they see fit to live as long as it does not interfere with the right of others to do similarly (the so-called 'harm principle').

Yet looking more closely at Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* in his *Ethics* we find very little to justify such fears. Although there are occasions at which his descriptions of certain virtues sit oddly with contemporary mores (the aristocratic account of *megalopsychia* or 'great mindedness' does so particularly), he did not attempt to specify to any determinate degree what the life of virtue comprised. Indeed, it is a central part of his understanding of ethics that the courses of action that embody virtue cannot be specified in abstraction from the concrete circumstances of ethical choice. *Eudaimonia* may certainly be a life of virtue,

but there is no single portrait of living well that can be applied to all people in all circumstances of life. Ronald Beiner explains this point by drawing a connection between ethics and aesthetics:

All [artistic] activities, in some fashion or other, strive after 'the beautiful work'. It would be ludicrous to employ aesthetic theory to dictate a single binding route to the creation of beauty. On the other hand, it would be equally crazy to suggest that there are no standards whatever in the evaluation of relative success or failure in the realisation of 'the beautiful work'... The truth lies neither in some kind of monistic algorithm nor in the concession to orderless diversity. Rather it is a matter of embodied judgement.³

The Aristotelian contention is that all good lives will be lives of virtue, not that all virtuous lives will be identical. Valuing courage, for instance, does not mean that we should encourage everyone to live the life of a soldier or a tight-rope walker. Virtues can be displayed in innumerable different situations by people living enormously variant lives. What they will have in common is being courageous, but this seems very far from the sort of limiting monism which liberals might have anything to fear from. The important point to which Beiner draws our attention is that an Aristotelian view allows us to retain confidence in our ability to draw some proper distinction between a life lived well and a life lived badly. To justify our judgement that an alcoholic or a violent criminal is not living a good life should not require us to specify the content of the perfect life with which they may be contrasted. There is just as much variety to be expected between different lives of virtue as there is between lives filled with degradation and vice.

If the notion of *eudaimonia* can lose so much of its apparent menace then what of the other sources of controversy? Certainly the scepticism of response (2) should not be seen to be an essential part of liberal thought. Many liberals have indeed grounded their political recommendations on the basis of some kind of scepticism or subjectivism about moral value, or about the possibility of knowing about value.⁴ The lack of any rational basis for prioritising any value or set of values over any others would seem to indicate that the

government should not act as if there were such a basis but should instead retain a neutral stance between all values. On this view, citizens would thus be liberated from the activities of governments who used their authority to assert their own preferred set of values. The main problem with this line of reasoning, as most liberal writers have recognised, is that although the protection of liberty could follow from such scepticism or subjectivism it is equally possible that it would deny us the resources to make any morally founded arguments against forces which actually threaten liberty. We could say that such threats lacked rational justification but not that they were morally problematical. This certainly seems unsatisfactory for any realistic account of the legitimacy of liberal government. In general, most contemporary liberal theorists are less concerned about the ontological status of moral judgements *per se* than about the machinery of the state being used to promote any such judgements. And, as Ronald Dworkin has explained, the reason for this concern for limits on state action can be seen as intimately connected with a keen respect for the importance of moral values. He maintains that if we believe that “each person should be free to choose personal ideals for himself, then this is surely because the choice of one life over another is a matter of supreme importance, not because it is of no importance at all.”⁵

There would not seem to be any insurmountable obstacles in the way of a liberal accepting Aristotelian positions (3), (4) and (5), concerning the role within morality and moral development of principles, character and the emotions, but some more difficulty might be thought to follow from (6) and (7). The first of these concerns the acceptability of educators acting to mould the character of those who have not rationally chosen for this to take place - an activity which would seem to violate those persons’ autonomy understood as their ability to choose their value commitments for themselves. The kind of directive character development which the Aristotelian understands to be an essential and pre-conditional part of moral education is ruled out of court by many liberal educators as an example of indoctrination rather than of education properly so-called. But it is not so clear that this kind

of education really does violate the autonomy of anyone. There is no particular reason to suppose that liberalism must be wedded to the view that educators should respect all decisions made by children about how they conduct themselves. A liberal can certainly hold that children lack the necessary aspects of rationality required to be capable of fully autonomous decisions and that, this being so, directive education could not be said to be violating *their* autonomy in any way. That same liberal might, however, still object to directive education on the grounds that it violates the autonomy of the adults these children are in the process of becoming. By acting to encourage a child to become one kind of person rather than another, their future choices are said to be biased by this initial ‘groundwork’ and are thus not fully autonomous. But, as Bennett and Sher have argued, this argument is not entirely conclusive as “although it purports to demonstrate that directive moral education *violates* moral autonomy, it really only shows that such education does not *contribute* to moral autonomy.”⁶ This is because we have no very promising reasons to think that the effects of directive education upon a person’s character must prevent them from being motivated by their appreciation of moral reasons (which is in itself a fairly strong interpretation of the requirements of autonomous action).⁷ We are all brought up with some set of values which we may consolidate, reject or revise as we develop into adult moral agents - it is simply not an available option for children to be insulated from any influence upon the content of their valuations until they are in a position to make fully rational moral choices for themselves. Indoctrination may be a proper charge against attempts to bring up children in such a way as to prevent them from making any real moral choices in adulthood (a process we would more readily term ‘brainwashing’), but it is of little concern when applied to reasonable attempts to prepare the moral sense of children who are not yet capable of making rational decisions for themselves.

The relationship of teachers’ private lives to their educational practice (at issue in claim (7)) is certainly a question which could have controversial implications. In previous chapters I

have used this as a convenient example of the way in which an Aristotelian understanding of the nature of moral development will diverge from conventions of law in liberal societies. Because of the agent-centred character of the Aristotelian view any account of moral education based upon this will be committed to the position that the moral character of both the school (its *ethos*) and the teachers within it will be the foremost factor of influence upon the development of its students' own characters. The notion of character used here implies the suffusion of moral commitments within all of the desires, choices and actions of a moral agent, and the notion of moral education implies that this cannot proceed in any way in which real desires, choices and action of the educator are not essentially implicated. The dual effect of these two elaborations is to make any attempt to characterise moral education as a morally neutral technical practice wholly alien to the Aristotelian. This will evidently conflict with a liberal concern to separate the public discharge of one's duties and the rules which govern this, from the private domain of an individual's own moral and non-moral commitments.

Liberal societies ordinarily do consider the private rectitude of teachers and others working with children to be an important issue when permitting people to be employed in such positions. Yet these considerations, often concerning previous criminal convictions, are perhaps best seen as matters of utilitarian predictive rationality rather than as a concession to the Aristotelian view. Certain persons are to be debarred from the teaching profession not because of any essential link thought to hold between educational practice and the moral character of the educator, but because of the predicted likelihood that these persons will improperly carry over their personal preferences into their activities in school. On this basis, a clear distinction between private character and professional practice can still be considered justifiable despite the acknowledgement of the need to protect children against the possibility that some may transgress its boundaries. A technicist interpretation of educational practice is in no way an essential part of a liberal view, but we have seen that

its rejection in the context of moral education can be the cause of some conflict with wider liberal practices. Nevertheless, an acceptance of the Aristotelian alternative would serve to expand our sense of the range of influences, both intended and unintended, that teachers can exert upon the children under their charge. If it is to take the nature of these influences seriously, a liberal society will have unavoidably to concern itself with the judgements involved in balancing the rights of teachers to privacy with the responsibilities it has to foster the proper moral development of children. The place of liberal values will be seen less in the question of whether these judgements have to be made than in the nature of those judgements which are.

Of course, these brief considerations do not exhaust the complex questions surrounding the relationship between liberalism and the core commitments of any neo-Aristotelian understanding of morality. Nevertheless, I hope that I have provided some reason to believe that this relationship need not be as straightforwardly conflictual as we may have thought. There are certainly many varieties of liberal theory which are incompatible, and these have tended to be the varieties expressed most clearly by the practices (or more often limitations on practices) of contemporary moral education. Prominent amongst these incompatible interpretations are those which see the core of liberalism to be the promotion of individuality or autonomous self-creation. Inspired by the thoughts of Mill, Kant and/or Nietzsche, such a view does not understand the role of moral education to be one of encouraging attachment to any particular moral values, but as encouraging children to reject the influence of tradition or convention and choose their own values from an entirely detached standpoint. Yet this is not the only way in which we can understand liberalism. In what remains of this chapter I shall discuss two other kinds of liberalism - both of which would seem to show more promise of being able to accommodate an education in virtue. I have already suggested that a liberal accommodation of a neo-Aristotelian virtue-ethical viewpoint could be of two kinds - toleration or integration. These strategies might best be

seen as different ways of responding to the central question posed for us by MacIntyre: Does the amount of disagreement concerning the good in liberal societies mean that a shared programme of moral education (understood in the Aristotelian manner) is impossible? The first kind of response is to accept that disagreement about the good is indeed as prevalent in liberal societies as MacIntyre describes. This being so, liberalism should abandon its misguided hope of imposing a liberal way of life on all people, and allow the adherents of different conceptions of the good (including the general Aristotelian conception) to live their lives and educate their children largely in accordance with these conceptions. Liberalism would retreat to being a theory of politics rather than of life itself, whereby policies aimed at the maintenance of basic justice and political stability would be legitimately justified on the basis of public reasons which can be shared by all. The second development of liberalism I shall discuss does not concede so much ground to MacIntyre's prognosis. Instead, it seeks to formulate a kind of liberalism which itself incorporates an Aristotelian understanding of the legitimate moral purpose of political authority as the promotion of well-being. Or, to look at it from another angle, it reinterprets the political implications of Aristotelianism in a way that gives our liberal concern for plurality and diversity its due. Either way, the liberal state's responsibilities would extend to take an active role in promoting the qualities of mind and character (the virtues) which constitute a liberal understanding of well-being.

For political liberals⁸ (the term now usually applied to those adopting the first of the strategies described above) it is the prevalence of reasonable disagreement about the good that serves as the main rationale for their reformulated variety of liberal theory. We should note two features of this claim. Firstly, this prevalence is not thought to be, as MacIntyre portrays it, an aberrational state which may be blamed upon faulty thinking about morality and politics. Rather, it is thought to be, as John Rawls phrases it, "the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional

democratic regime.”⁹ In other words, where disagreement is permitted, disagreement will out. Also, although Rawls uses the term “the fact of reasonable pluralism” to describe this feature of contemporary societies, we should not think that any difficulties have been resolved by bringing out the moral pluralism in Aristotle’s account of well-being. For disagreement between reasonable people will, on this view, extend to include controversies concerning not only the nature of the good life but also the validity and extent of pluralism itself.¹⁰ Given this, the aim of liberal thought should be to extend the principle of toleration which it has traditionally applied to religion to philosophy itself.¹¹

This defining strategy of political liberalism, variously termed as one of ‘discontinuity’¹² ‘avoidance’¹³, or ‘epistemic abstinence’¹⁴, recommends that the aims of the liberal state (which for Rawls remain loosely as summarised by the two ordered principles of justice described in *A Theory of Justice*, applying only to the ‘basic structure’ of society) must be justifiable to all reasonable citizens. Not only is the legitimacy accorded by this scale of justification valuable in itself but in its absence the liberal state would endanger its own stability. For this kind of legitimacy to be possible, they maintain, political aims cannot be founded upon, or publicly defended by, any of the various ‘comprehensive’ doctrines that co-exist within democratic societies. This category includes both first order moral prescriptions (whether religious or secular, liberal or illiberal) and second order views (realism, subjectivism etc.) about the nature and status of these. Instead, political values are to be supported by what Rawls calls ‘public reason’¹⁵ - a mode of thought available to all suitably educated citizens and which arises from the limited degree of value consensus that *does* exist in democratic societies. This involves political argument and justification proceeding by means of an appeal to reasons which can be shared by all citizens, whatever their own particular attachments to various wider doctrines about the nature and content of morality. As described by Stephen Macedo:

What political liberalism asks of us is not to renounce what we believe to be true but to acknowledge the difficulty of publicly establishing any single account of the whole truth. It invites us to put some of our (true) beliefs aside when it comes to laying the groundwork for common political institutions. In accepting this invitation, we are not moved by the power of those with whom we join but by respect for their reasonableness. We do not seek to respect pluralism or diversity as such but reasonable pluralism.¹⁶

To the extent that the proponents of these wider doctrines are, if reasonable, able to accept this requirement for the bracketing of their own beliefs when certain political matters are at issue, they illustrate the existence of an 'overlapping consensus' in a pluralist society which serves to uphold the political liberal strategy itself. And in refusing the legitimacy of attempts to base political policies upon comprehensive moral doctrines, the state remains neutral between these and thereby respects the rights of individuals to choose their conceptions of the good for themselves, free from the undue influence of the state.¹⁷

Of course the complexity of the arguments for political liberalism (especially as provided by Rawls) have been only hinted at here. Nevertheless, we are in a position to consider some of the implications which this general approach to liberal theory has for our educational concerns. These implications will concern both the nature of the system by means of which we discharge a public responsibility for education, and the nature of the curriculum and pedagogical practice within those institutions which comprise this system. It may seem, for instance, that liberalism should be committed to fostering a system of common schooling, whereby children from different cultural, ethical and religious traditions are educated side by side. For those brands of liberalism which aim at the promotion of autonomy and individuality, common schooling would appear to be one of the most effective tools to encourage this end result (or at least to challenge some of the main sources of heteronomy and homogeneity). Yet if children were obliged to attend this kind of school, funded from the receipts of compulsory taxation of the representatives of various comprehensive moral traditions and viewpoints, it would be difficult for a *political* liberal state to permit very much in the way of a determinate moral education. For, to a large extent, common schools

would be unable to educate in any way which was not neutral (in terms of its justification) between these different traditions and viewpoints. This would rule out Kohlbergian approaches aimed at fostering moral autonomy as much as religiously inspired efforts to inculcate a faith in God. The content of the moral education which remained justifiable would be comprised by those elements which derive from, or are necessary to support, the 'thin' conception of the good which political liberalism itself represents. Schools would thereby be acting in part to develop the various "... forms of thought and feeling that sustain fair social co-operation between its citizens..."¹⁸ The cognitive abilities involved in appreciating the demands and possibilities of 'public reason' would be taught and fostered together with the associative attachments to the values of toleration and fairness which are pre-conditions of reasonableness. This indicates that the development of virtue would be a definite responsibility of the liberal state. It is recognised that liberalism must not ignore the character of its citizenry as an irrelevancy or inappropriate matter of concern, but should acknowledge that the continued stable existence of a just liberal polity is greatly dependent upon this.

But this is still rather distant from the kind of Aristotelian moral education we have been considering throughout this thesis. For one thing, the virtues which are justifiably to be developed by a political liberal state are extremely attenuated - limited to those states of character which can attract the approbation of all reasonable persons comprising a society's overlapping consensus and which can be justified by means of public reason.¹⁹ This will certainly not be enough to develop all of the virtues that are required across a person's life. Also, even those virtues which may be developed are understood in a non-Aristotelian way. Political traits and skills are to be developed which may indeed produce hoped for results in terms of the behaviour of citizens and an ensuing state of political stability. But these traits and skills are virtues only in the sense described by Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* - "... strong and normally effective desires to act on the basic principles of right."²⁰ They are the

motivational counterparts of intellectual commitments both to the principles underpinning the processes of political liberalism and the principles which are themselves justified by means of the operation of these processes. As we know, Aristotle understood the operation of virtuous judgement to be such a complex and contextually dependent matter that it would necessarily outstrip any efforts to summarise it in terms of adherence to principles. But in the context of the public legitimization of political action required by political liberalism, it is hard to see how moral education could extend much further than the promotion of belief in certain consensual principles and of the motivation to act in accordance with that belief. For to push our educational efforts into those 'deeper' areas of character which form the grounds for any differentiation between virtues and skills would be to transgress beyond the domain of consensus and into the ground occupied by wider moral doctrines. I shall return to this thought a little later.

This attenuation of virtue, both in terms of its range and its depth, is not itself any surprise. Political liberalism is of course not to be seen as an attempt to provide us with a satisfying conception of a fully rounded moral life, for the provision of these conceptions is the defining function of comprehensive doctrines. Political liberalism adopts a stance of neutrality concerning both the merits of competing comprehensive doctrines and the very question of whether this function of comprehensive doctrines is itself something of value. Yet despite this lack of engagement, we are able to see how this view may be, on the surface at least, better prepared than other varieties of liberalism to accommodate efforts at moral education based upon the development of virtue (in all its potentially deeper senses). For although political liberals do not seek to justify their views by means of any appeal to the merits of virtue ethics (they are of course precluded from doing so), we might judge that one consequence of the withdrawal of liberal strictures from a great deal of life is that virtue is allowed the room to breathe which it is denied by competing varieties of comprehensive liberalism. Whereas MacIntyre saw the claims of virtue to necessitate the

rejection of liberal modernity in favour of a return to localised ethical communities, political liberalism would seem to offer a kind of compromise position whereby the liberal state becomes an overseer of, and arbitrator between, the claims of these divergent communities. Indeed, I have earlier argued that MacIntyre's ambivalent attitude towards moral pluralism had led him to ignore the necessity for some such socially overarching authority which had the purpose of preserving the diversity of moral traditions which was so essential to his non-foundational epistemology.²¹ In this way, one might see the virtue-ethical tradition as forming just one of the many comprehensive doctrines which themselves overlap to provide the consensual justification of political liberalism.

On this interpretation, the development of virtue could properly take place outside of those institutions, such as the common school, which are limited to practices which can be justified by public reason. We might therefore envisage a variety of different schools within a society, each reflecting the preferred moral and pedagogical views of a different group of parents. Just as MacIntyre has written of the University, we could imagine religious schools joined in a pluralist system by those devoted to the promotion of Millian individuality or Kantian autonomy, all co-existing beneath the tolerant umbrella of a political liberal state permitting them the opportunity to teach according to the pedagogical agenda of their own comprehensive doctrine. So, where this agenda prescribes an Aristotelian approach to the development of virtue then that is what will take place.

But just because an Aristotelian pedagogy is to be *tolerated*²² in schools, this does not mean that it will thereby truly form part of a fully Aristotelian conception of *ethismos*. To return to one of the central themes of this thesis, we will have to be satisfied that this school-based pedagogy is not rendered ineffective by the overwhelming forces of contrary social conditioning emanating from outside the classroom. It is these more general sources of moral education - the mass media, business practices, social welfare arrangements, court judgements - which form such a large part of a wider Aristotelian conception of moral

development, and which will need to be in some harmony with our preferred form of school-based pedagogy if that is not to represent a mere pipedream. As explained by Amelie Rorty:

One thing seems clear, indeed trivially clear: the better the political and economic system, and the more just are the social arrangements, the easier it is both to be and to become what we are pleased to call 'morally decent'. The worse social and political and economic arrangements are, the more difficult it is to present good lives as rewarding models, the more difficult and the more costly it is to integrate personal satisfactions with public decency. This should not be surprising. After all, a good polity is one in which the activities and traits that conduce to the public good are, at the very least, in harmony, if not actually identical with those exercised in the long range flourishing of individual lives.²³

In what way may these observations affect our judgement of political liberalism? Certainly, it is not possible for a faithfully Aristotelian form of education to exist in an entirely uncompromised form. For Aristotle did not recognise the sharp distinction between public and non-public forms of practical reason that is at the heart of the political liberal project. Instead, all instances of choice (whether they concerned decisions in a political referendum, marital infidelity or table manners) called for the expression of virtues which were united under and ordered by the common end of *eudaimonia*. Deliberations about social welfare arrangements would therefore be taught as involving the very same virtue of justice, chosen for the same conception of the good, as any discussions of fairness within the home. Yet this divergence between Aristotelian and political liberal conceptions of moral judgement need not prove conclusive. Political liberalism does not maintain that the Aristotelian view of the unity of practical reason is wrong or untrue. Rather, it claims that in the context of the reasonable disagreements so prevalent in contemporary societies any reasonable adherent to an Aristotelian comprehensive moral doctrine will be able to bracket parts of this doctrine when controversial political issues are at stake. Thus, political liberalism avoids rather than opposes those claims of comprehensive doctrines which run counter to it. It asks not that we *deny* our own viewpoints in the public domain, but that we see reason to put them aside in certain situations as a pragmatic compromise to the demands of politics in

plural societies. And the reasons why we may agree to put our views aside like this may themselves arise from our own comprehensive doctrine (such as an account of toleration as a component virtue of *eudaimonia*).

Already there are likely to be adherents of certain comprehensive doctrines who would be unable to countenance even this level of accommodation with the requirements of political liberalism. If, for instance, I believed that only certain classes of my fellow citizens possessed the capacity for rational decision-making, I could hardly be expected to put this view aside in favour of a public rationality which gave equal status to the beliefs of all reasonable persons. In this case my comprehensive moral doctrine explicitly opposes the kinds of political attitude and practice required by political liberalism, and in doing so can no longer be considered 'reasonable' as it refuses to recognise the reasonableness of alternative doctrines. The overlapping consensus underpinning the conception of a stable liberal state is thereby not a universal consensus. It is limited only to those doctrines that are in a position to do what political liberalism requests of them.

Despite these limitations, we might judge that it is at least possible for an Aristotelian educator to be considered part of 'the reasonable'. As we noted earlier, political liberalism would require that all children be brought up to learn those virtues which are required to underpin the existence of the political liberal state. In short therefore, the reasonableness of an educator or an educational institution will be judged by the extent to which they promote the reasonableness of those under their authority. Whatever the nature of their comprehensive doctrines children will be educated to observe a proper distinction in their practical reasoning between public and non-public matters. This will not mean that an Aristotelian educator will have to tell his or her class that what they know to be true about justice in one domain of moral choice does not hold true of another. Instead, they may teach that they should put aside their true justification of a just choice in certain contexts in favour of a strategy of argumentation which serves other, more general goods.

But although it is possible for us to reconcile political liberal and Aristotelian education in this way, it is unclear that this reconciliation is much more than an academic enterprise. For the practical conjunction of these two kinds of education would seem to pose important problems. We should not imagine that all of the reasonable adherents to comprehensive doctrines enjoy the same relationship with political liberalism. An Aristotelian educator is likely to be put in a difficult position by the demand that their belief in the nature of well-being should be ignored when they come to debate issues of political importance. Children may understandably begin asking why it is that they should ever ignore moral truths which they have been taught are of such great importance to their lives. Rather than strengthening public reason, we might well imagine that a result of this kind of education would be to encourage children to think that any area of life from which their comprehensive moral beliefs and commitments are debarred should be accorded less respect as a consequence. The educator may of course respond with an explanation for the bracketing of moral beliefs which itself draws upon the values of their comprehensive doctrine. But here again, those receiving this explanation might be expected to wonder why it is that public reason must displace their comprehensive doctrine from important areas of life if this stricture can only be justified by appeal to the validity of comprehensive values. In other words, the priority of the political is being supported by an argumentative strategy which does not itself accord it this priority at all.

This need not mean that such lessons are impossible to teach, but we should at least acknowledge that the task of the Aristotelian educator is very much more difficult than that facing those whose comprehensive doctrines are more amenable to political liberalism. For although Rawls is clear that his theory is not based upon any scepticism, subjectivism, or indeed *any* meta-ethical view about the nature of moral values, it is equally clear that a sceptical or subjectivist educator would not be posed the same difficulties by the educational demands of political liberalism as would the Aristotelian. For such an educator would be

able to utilise the official or public justification for public reason - that the burdens of judgement are such that we should not expect others to have the same moral beliefs as we have, even if we believe our own to hold true for all persons. This defence has the advantage that it offers a morally free-standing argument for a morally free-standing conception of politics. But it is difficult to see what use an Aristotelian teacher or school could make of this argument. For it would require that children are taught both that there is a justified true account of well-being which holds for all persons *and* that other people holding contrary views are just as likely to be correct. To believe in both of these positions would seem to require either a schizophrenic mentality, or some other means of avoiding the commonplace logic that belief in the second claim provides reason to doubt a belief in the first. Neither of these two options are the sorts of state we would wish to see willfully promoted by educators.

These considerations already suggest that political liberalism is less able than we may have imagined to permit the practical realisation of an education in virtue. The distance involved in straddling the theoretical commitments of an Aristotelian understanding of morality and the justification of political liberalism seems just too great for comfort. Yet these difficulties increase yet further when we consider the importance of the social embodiment of comprehensive moral doctrines and the forms of education based upon them. For even if we were comfortable that we could allow for our own comprehensive doctrine to be taught alongside a mode of public reason which was limited to certain specific domains, we would also have to be confident that we could maintain this proper balance. Given what I have said about the educative function of a whole variety of social and cultural forces, we must attend to the possibility that our carefully balanced and circumscribed lessons are reinforced to such different degrees that their effects depart greatly from their intentions. Where these social forces are either governed by the prescriptions of public reason itself (such as constitutional arrangements and the tenor of political debate), or exhibit a scepticism about

or disregard for moral values (such as many justifications of market economics) their effect will surely be to diminish the power of the moral education provided by the Aristotelian educator. Where a comprehensive moral doctrine, however reasonable, exists at the margins of liberal society both in terms of numbers of its adherents and the social centrality of its values and theoretical commitments, political liberalism's promises of neutrality and toleration ring rather hollow.

Of course, these values of neutrality and toleration are not advocated by political liberals as a means of maintaining and fostering the diversity of comprehensive doctrines as if this were a good in itself.²⁴ Rather, they are values already implicit in the reasonable political culture of liberal democracies and which enable a minimal but moral conception of justice as fairness to achieve stability in the context of plural societies. The natural result of political liberalism may well be that those comprehensive doctrines which have most difficulty in accommodating the demands made upon them gradually lose their adherents. Yet as this process would not have been a deliberate aim of the state, it is not seen by political liberals to be a matter of particular concern.²⁵ Political liberalism honours and respects the various comprehensive doctrines in a plural society by offering a way for much of the coercive activity of the state to be justified to all – something which would not seem possible for the more controversial kinds of liberal theory. It does not pretend, however, that it is able to ensure that neutrally-justified policies actually affect all persons and doctrines in the same way and to the same degree. Given the enormously complex and various factors which influence the social repercussions of any given policy it is thought to be sociologically unrealistic to think that governments should aim for any further neutrality than that which governs the justification of their actions. In Macedo's words, "there is as much substance in political liberalism's conceptions of neutrality and fairness as our shared standards of reasonableness - and respect for reasonable disagreement - allow."²⁶

Political liberalism certainly differs from many comprehensively liberal alternatives in that it does not rule out the possibility for citizens who so wish to educate their children, to some degree at least, in a deliberately Aristotelian manner. Nevertheless, it cannot offer any realistic promise that this will take place in a social context which is of a character conducive to their educational aims. If we are convinced both that such a context is essential to the kind of moral education we envisage and that it will come into being only *via* acts of political intervention, then we will evidently need to look elsewhere for a means of reconciling these thoughts with liberal values. And, as I have suggested already, this alternative kind of liberal view will in certain ways seek to achieve this reconciliation by actually upholding certain key Aristotelian standpoints itself. Earlier in this chapter I suggested that many of these standpoints should not necessarily be seen as contrary to liberal values. We have some reason to think that Aristotle's thought, freed from the influence of many of its medieval and scholastic interpreters, is in at least some ways conducive to many of the values we now consider to be distinctively liberal. In what remains of this concluding chapter I shall indicate the promise that this second path of reconciliation may hold for us, exemplified chiefly by the work of Joseph Raz.

To borrow Rawls' terminology, Raz's liberalism is both comprehensive and perfectionist - thereby aligning it with two aspects of the Aristotelian position (although he does not claim such a heritage for his thought). His liberalism is comprehensive in that it upholds the unity of moral and political judgement - disavowing any essential distinction thought to hold between public and non-public forms of reason in the justification of political decisions. And, connectedly, it is perfectionist in that it sees political morality to be "concerned primarily with protecting and promoting the well-being of people" - a goal which necessarily involves the state acting on the basis of a true and comprehensive account of what well-being involves and requires. Raz's liberalism is not a matter solely of the limits and strictures thought to apply to the activity of the state (although he does defend such

limitations in many areas), but also bases itself upon an account of well-being which holds that a good life is a life lived autonomously.²⁷ More precisely, his liberal account of well-being holds that this "... consists in the (1) whole-hearted and (2) successful pursuit of (3) valuable (4) activities."²⁸

Of interest here is the way in which Raz integrates autonomy with a neo-Aristotelian conception of the nature and purpose of political morality so that each is seen to require the other. As we know, the liberal value of autonomy has often been used to underpin arguments against those who believe that the state can properly make and act upon judgements concerning the relative merits of different moral positions. For if it is valuable that people live a life according to their own moral lights then surely it would defeat this purpose if the state were to act in ways to influence their choices concerning such matters. Equally, the value of promoting individual autonomy in education was often taken to mean that one should permit only those pedagogical interventions which remained entirely neutral between competing moral positions (save, perhaps, for the value of autonomy itself). Earlier, I suggested that more directive kinds of moral education which did seek to influence the beliefs and characters of children in certain definite directions could not properly be thought to *violate* autonomy. In the more general context of the justification of political decisions, Raz's view goes beyond this suggestion. He claims not merely that perfectionist political policies do not violate autonomy, but also that the protection and promotion of autonomy in fact *requires* policies of this kind.

Raz maintains that the fact of someone choosing their way of life or moral actions for themselves is not sufficient to prove that they are autonomous. For one of the preconditions of his concept of autonomy is that there exists an adequate range of options from which a choice is to be made. If a social environment is so monistic that only one way of life is available, a person could not truly be considered autonomous in willingly choosing this way of life and a government would not be upholding the value of autonomy if they and it

refrained from influencing this social environment to increase the range of available options. Yet even if there were to be a variety of options available in society this would not enable autonomous choice if only one of these options were to be morally valuable. To reject a plethora of immoral alternatives in favour of acting in the cause of virtue indicates that one is fighting for what Raz calls “moral survival”, not living autonomously.²⁹ Therefore, for the state to uphold and promote a conception of well-being concerned with the autonomous pursuit of valuable lives it must act to ensure that people are able to choose amongst a variety of valuable alternatives. This will require not only that people are free from being straightforwardly coerced into one particular life or that they possess the appropriate mental and sentimental capacities for making meaningful choices, but also that these choices are truly open to be made in reality.

It is clear that this understanding of the perfectionist role of the state in promoting the good life coheres well with the more pluralistic interpretation of Aristotle I offered earlier.

Although Raz defends the view that the state is capable of making and acting upon legitimate moral judgements about the relative merits of different ways of life, he stresses that this must not and cannot result in monistic uniformity, however saintly this way of life might be. It must not because, as we have seen, well-being is not only about living a life with a certain behavioural content but also about choosing this content for proper reasons and in an autonomous manner. It cannot because Raz holds that moral value is plural and incommensurable. It is not possible to encompass all valuable aspects of life within the context of one’s own existence. This is not due to people being brought up in the wrong way or living in the wrong kind of society, but because not all values are such that they may be combined within a single life. As autonomous individuals we are capable of choosing amongst different valuable ways of life, of extending our talents in many different worthwhile directions, but we do not have the opportunity to extend in all directions as each

way of life will "...call on different qualities and require the relative neglect of even suppression of other qualities which are good in themselves." ³⁰

Similarly, Raz observes a tendency for values to form "nested structures", whereby further values become open to us through a prior commitment to other broader or more foundational values within our chosen projects. The converse of the way in which one's pursuit of valuable projects makes other valuable projects unavailable to us is the way in which selecting one project amongst others creates for us new possibilities of success or failure - new sources of value. In other words, many values are 'agent-relative' in the sense that certain options become valuable only for those whose lives have followed a certain kind of narrative path which enables such options to have a value in the context of a well-lived life. We should be careful to note, however, that this does not amount to an endorsement of subjectivism. Raz rejects the view that what makes something valuable is the fact that someone has chosen it as being so. Rather he is noting that although the value of the different options available to a person in a particular context is not critically dependent upon whether or not they consider them to be valuable, it can be said that the range or nature of these options is such as it is partly because of the chosen projects of the person to whom they are available. Something which is valuable for the autonomous, whole-hearted and successful pursuit of a life as a philosopher may not be so for those who are pursuing athleticism in the same manner, even though both of these broader goals are at the opposite end of the value spectrum from those autonomously, whole-heartedly and successfully pursuing the arts of burglary or idleness.

In the context of the intimate relationship holding between moral pluralism and the value of autonomy, many liberal fears about perfectionist politics cease to seem quite so appropriate. Not only does Raz recognise that there are numerous ways in which one may achieve well-being, but he also rejects the idea that governments are able to make people autonomous.

As he explains:

To be autonomous, they have to live their own lives for themselves. Governments, and other people generally, can help people flourish, but only by creating the conditions for autonomous life, primarily by guaranteeing that an adequate range of diverse and valuable options shall be available to all. Beyond that they must leave individuals free to make of their lives what they will.³¹

As this indicates, Raz's conception of the state retains a liberal attachment to the weak government, the role of which should extend no further than the provision of the framework conditions for the autonomous creation of a pluralistic society. Although this is no kind of libertarianism (which implies the view that values are commensurable *via* economic rationality), it places an important limit on our understanding of the place of the state in promoting the well-being of citizens. For not only does Raz agree that there are some very real reasons for us to be wary of the overwhelming powers of political authority even when its aims are justified³², but his notion of well-being itself precludes any idea that the government may be able to *ensure* its achievement. The state may provide people with the opportunity to live an autonomous life, but it is up to them to make the choices which are to both lead to and comprise it. Nonetheless, we should recognise that this liberal perfectionism goes far beyond any of the other varieties of liberalism we have encountered in promising means of concord with many of the core commitments of an Aristotelian conception of moral education.

Although Raz has not written in any detail about the educational ramifications of his ideas, it does not seem fanciful to suppose that educational institutions would provide a very important means by which the state could fulfil its duty to promote well-being. His arguments imply that a perfectionist liberal state will be obliged both to fund those key institutions (such as schools and colleges) which help to form autonomous moral agents (given that certain values will not be commensurable to individual economic rationality), and to grant those institutions operational autonomy to the extent that they fulfil this educational role. The state will be concerned that the conditions of autonomy are being met. Firstly, therefore, that children are not being coerced or manipulated into an unquestioning

acceptance of some or other doctrine. Secondly, that they are being equipped with the “mental abilities” required for autonomous decision-making - where these abilities extend beyond the narrowly cognitive to embrace the emotional and sentimental aspects of judgement that we have discussed in previous chapters. To this extent, the state would take sides in the debate about moral education which I have discussed in this thesis, and will see it as a responsibility of schools to venture beyond the limitations imposed by the supporters of Kohlberg, Wilson, or Values Clarification. This form of education will need to follow a difficult path whereby it is actively involved in something like an Aristotelian development of character, without being accused of manipulation or coercion. But if we are to remain hopeful that liberal values and Aristotelian ideas about moral development are not entirely contradictory we must believe that there is a path here to be followed, however narrow it may turn out to be.

Furthermore, it is responsibility of the state to care for the third condition of autonomy that provides greater hope that this kind of education has a chance of success. Repeatedly, I have been sceptical about those arguments for the education of virtuous character which ignore the marginal position this would have within the dominant *ethos* of contemporary liberal societies. We may argue that liberal values and character-education are reconcilable, but this is of little use if such an educational form would emerge still-born if practically instituted. As we know, the third condition of autonomy is that there exists a sufficient range of truly valuable options so that an education which fulfills the first two conditions will enable people to exercise their freely developed mental capacities in the service of their well-being. Raz argues that for the state to ensure the continued existence of a variety of valuable options it must attend to the way in which such options are grounded in what he calls “social forms”. One may claim that we have opportunity to follow a variety of different valuable lives just as long as the first two conditions of autonomy are met, but Raz, coming close to MacIntyre’s elucidation of the nature of a ‘practice’, recognises that

“... a person’s well-being depends to a large extent on success in socially defined and determined pursuits and activities.”³³ Where these are not of the range and character required to support autonomous choice between them it means little to say that we are still formally free to make such choices.

MacIntyre’s Janus-faced attitude towards moral pluralism - a state he both abhorred and required - meant that he has been unable to articulate any role for political authority in its maintenance. By contrast, Raz is explicit in stressing that it is a key responsibility of the state (and a source of its legitimacy) to fulfil this function. The liberal state must protect the possibility of well-being for its citizens by intervening in civil society where the untrammelled operations of market-led economic rationality threaten the co-existence of the necessary variety of incommensurably valuable social forms. One might debate the details of this approach. For instance, it is not obvious quite what degree of variety is necessary to sustain the possibility of autonomous choice, or quite how valuable each social option need be. In other words, what is the threshold for autonomy to be enabled? And connectedly, would the state’s obligation extend any further than the point at which this threshold was established? Should we be concerned if there are alternative and perhaps more valuable social options which are withering away from a lack of state support even though there are options of a sufficient number and valuable available already?

Whatever the detail of Raz’s approach it is by now clear that it would attract criticism from both liberal and ‘anti-liberal’ commentators claiming that he does not appreciate the demands made upon politics by the facts of moral disagreement. I shall address these likely criticisms in brief here and suggest that both are underpinned by a similarly biased conception of the nature of moral disagreement. Political liberals, for instance, may argue that a liberal state cannot hope for legitimacy and stability if it dares to make and act upon judgements concerning the relative merits of the moral views embraced by its citizens. Such matters are just too hot to handle at the political level. As Macedo claims in discussing the

‘ballast’ which prevents modern Western societies descending into the conflicts of the past or of present day Yugoslavia or Lebanon:

If our political culture is dependent on our political institutions - including the work done by the political avoidance of religious controversy - then encouraging the politicisation of the deepest and historically most destructive forms of disagreement could undermine the culture and jettison the ballast.³⁴

Yet in defence of the comprehensiveness of Raz’s approach, one might respond that political avoidance of controversy is not necessarily the best way to ensure that moral disagreement does not threaten the stability of the state. Given the wide acceptance of the view that moral judgement is not bifurcated into public and non-public forms, the banishing of comprehensive doctrines from the political realm might arguably be thought to bring about an increase in social tensions. At a personal level for instance, if I felt justified in relying upon and expressing my moral convictions in a political context, but was unable to do so, my feelings of frustration might not be wholly assuaged by the fact that someone with a different moral view but similar intentions was constricted in the same way. This constriction could well serve to exacerbate our moral differences and the social dangers of disagreement even though we have been treated equally. And of course, where the activities of the state have and are seen to have effects which are not similarly equal, as political liberals admit they will, such difficulties may be heightened further.

This is not intended to be a definitive causal story, but at least offers a competing account of the effects of including or excluding comprehensive moral doctrines from politics to that provided by political liberals. In general, their understanding of moral disagreement and plurality seems to be modeled upon the kinds of extreme contemporary and historical examples cited by Macedo. Why, for instance, do the most commonly discussed real-life exemplars of the strains pluralism places upon politics concern the preferred educational curricula of Amish and fundamentalist Christian communities - perhaps our nearest analogies to the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century? As well as providing an

arguably exaggerated picture of the extent of moral disagreement in most contemporary liberal societies (and one which betrays the origin of their ideas in an almost exclusively North American context), this model of disagreement also seems to be skewed unreasonably towards its cognitive and inter-personal aspects. Moral pluralism is surely not exclusively a matter of conflicts of doctrinal belief between different persons or groups of persons. We may equally see it evinced in differences of affective character which are irreducible to expressions of principled belief (which may be indeed be shared), or in occasions of *intra*-personal conflict, of affective or cognitive dissonance within the outlook of individuals. The fragmentations characteristic of modernity may in this way be rather more complex, both more and less extensive along different continua, than how they are described by Rawls, Macedo or Larmore.

With a more contoured understanding of the nature of moral pluralism, expressed equally by the social conditioning of moral weakness³⁵ as by inter-faith skirmishes, we may feel less concern with the notion of a perfectionist liberal state. Or, at the very least, we will feel rather less convinced that Rawls' overlapping consensus, the achievement of cross-doctrinal agreement about the core principles of liberal justice, is a fully appropriate response to the demands that plurality makes of politics. As Raz has argued,

... many factors contribute to the stability of a country's political system: the nature of its culture, its history of past conflicts, the depth of feeling concerning current rivalries, and so on. The point is that they are only remotely sensitive to the existence of anything remotely like Rawls' overlapping consensus. The latter is neither necessary nor sufficient, and even were it to exist it would play only a partial role in securing unity and stability.³⁶

In this sense, the kind of agreement upon which the liberal state rests is both 'thinner' and 'thicker' than how it is portrayed by political liberals. It is thinner in that it is less cognitively demanding - a broad and general attachment to ideas about the legitimacy of the state may co-exist comfortably with differences of opinion about particular political issues. But this comfort is provided by the 'thicker' aspects of agreement, extending into the realms

of common sentiment and fellow-feeling beyond mere cognitive identity. In many contemporary societies, it does not seem unreasonable to think that these kinds of agreement will be enough to ensure the stability of a state which sought to respect its citizens by treating them “in accordance with sound moral principles”³⁷, rather than by excluding such concerns from politics altogether.

Of course, opposition to these ideas should not be expected to arise only from liberals. For the thrust of MacIntyre’s anti-liberalism is that any attempt to reconcile Aristotelian politics or politically-bolstered education in the context of modern plural societies is doomed to failure. As for political liberals, the objection would once again be that Raz underestimates the serious consequences the facts of moral disagreement have for the justification of the liberal state and its activities. In the context of our educational concerns, it may be argued that the autonomy of different and incommensurable social forms and pedagogic practices will make it difficult to claim that there is a shared justification for all such enterprises. For how can we meaningfully claim to be promoting autonomy or the cognitive and affective capacities for moral judgement if the nature of these ends is understood in almost infinitely variable ways? For MacIntyre, Raz’s justification of the state would be more Humean than Aristotelian. It does not express the existence of true political virtues, but merely “an appearance of virtue congruent with the rhetoric of shared values” which is itself “well-served by the indeterminacy of the virtue-concepts of contemporary commonplace usage”.³⁸

As we have seen earlier, MacIntyre sets very particular criteria for something to be considered a true instance of virtue. Due to his support for a ‘blueprint’ conception of moral judgement in Aristotle and Aquinas, virtue proper is considered to exist only against the background of a full cognitive picture of the content of *eudaimonia*. The incommensurability of different social forms, recognised in their own ways by Raz and MacIntyre, means for the latter that any institution which exists outside of these localised contexts will find itself without such a cognitive picture. It will trade only in a fictitious

simulacrum of virtue. But we have also seen that this 'blueprint' account is far from being the last word on these matters as there is considerable support for a view of virtue-ethical moral judgement which does not set such cognitive requirements. This view stresses the role of the affective dimension and comprehends well-being in a pluralistic and open-ended way - as a universal which is brought to bear upon particular instances of virtuous judgement in a partial and piecemeal form and which is refined and developed through such instances. Given this interpretation, Raz's avowedly general account of the moral purpose of the liberal state will not seem so alien to the account of neo-Aristotelian education I have supported throughout this thesis. It will offer a generally supportive social environment within which this kind of educational practice can proceed with realistic hope.

The conditions of modernity present the educator with a very particular challenge - of bringing children up to be happy, knowledgeable, skilled and virtuous adults with a good chance of success in a world characterised by moral disagreement and by despair about the capacity of education to halt the decline of moral standards. I have suggested that we should accept this challenge as one capable of being met, but as requiring a great deal of thought. My arguments began with the suggestion that we cannot hope to educate virtuous adults, to reverse any moral decline (if such a thing exists), without adopting an alternative understanding of moral judgement and of the education it requires to that which has underpinned much of post-war thought about such matters. Furthermore, it is a component part of this understanding that educational institutions cannot hope to meet all the demands placed upon them without the assistance of political action to rectify the contrary forces in society which serve to make their noble efforts near futile. The resultant difficulty is that in the context of modern plural societies this kind of political action will only be uncontroversial if it is in the service of ends about which everyone agrees. And the only kinds of moral education about which this would seem to be true are those which abstain entirely from controversial content - precisely those which I had rejected at the beginning.

The central question of this thesis has concerned the possibility of avoiding this negative conclusion, whether supported by those who see the claims of virtue as a reason to castigate liberal modernity or by those who see the fact of moral pluralism as a reason to reject the Aristotelian idea of virtue as inappropriate to the conditions of modernity. In this final chapter, I have sought to provide a general defence of the thought that such an avoidance may be possible. Those educational and political activities which are tolerated or promoted by a Razian perfectionist state will not result in the resurrection of Aristotle's *polis*. The social conditions of modernity, its complexity and multiplicity, make this an unreasonable suggestion. In such conditions, various social forms or practices will conduct education within a context of limitation and support from a state whose political morality will be significantly more general. Whilst it will act in a way which favours those educational practices which address the development of virtue in a broad enough manner, it will not *itself* intervene in the issues of character and sentiment which such practices develop. To repeat quotations from Bernard Williams and Joseph Raz cited in the first part of this thesis:

In particular, modern complex society functions which are ethically significant are performed by public agencies and, if the society is relatively open, this requires that they be governed by an explicable order which allows those agencies to be answerable. In a public, large and impersonal forum 'intuition' will not serve, though it will serve (and nothing else could serve) in personal life and in a more closely shared existence.³⁹

In mass, highly mobile societies, public authorities are particularly ill-adapted to judge matters in which having the right feelings, the proper moral sensibilities, is of particular importance. They are more suited to dealing with abstract principles, with general rights and duties, than with matters of moral character, personal relations, etc.⁴⁰

These observations indicate the parameters set around any attempt to integrate Aristotle's moral thought with the plural conditions of modernity. Just as the success of moral education rests upon certain kinds of political action, so the existence of the political order which enables these actions rests upon the success of moral education. The co-dependance

of politics and education requires the existence of educated citizens - adults whose moral virtue extends into the political realm. The concluding suggestions of this chapter indicate that an extension of this kind can be meaningfully virtuous without endangering social stability. The education of such citizens represents our most hopeful route for developing the best aspects of individuals and of the society in which all of us must live.

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- ¹ Although conservative writers often present themselves as requesting a return to traditional values, it is not always clear that these represent much more than nostalgia for a mythical past. And further, even if the *values* are the same as those taught in the past, it is doubtful whether they would remain unaffected by the change of historical context. It is for these sorts of reasons that the conservative claims are only in one sense for a *re-*imposition of values.
 - ² Amongst which we might include churches, residential groups and civic associations which exist between the individual and the greater institutions of public life. Cf. Berger, PL and Neuhaus, RJ *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (1977, Washington DC, American Enterprise Institute); Putnam, R *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993, Princeton, Princeton University Press).
 - ³ Beiner, R 'The Moral Vocabulary of Liberalism' in *NOMOS XXXIV: Virtue* 1992 p. 150.
 - ⁴ The most often cited contemporary example is the work of Bruce Ackerman, especially his *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (1980, New Haven, Yale University Press).
 - ⁵ Dworkin, R 'Neutrality, Equality and Liberalism' in McLean, D and Mills, C (eds.) *Liberalism Reconsidered* (1983, Totawa NJ, Rowman and Allenheld) p. 2.
 - ⁶ Sher, G and Bennett, WJ 'Moral Education and Indoctrination' in *The Journal of Philosophy* November 1982 p. 669.
 - ⁷ This charge would require the premises that "(1) a single act cannot simultaneously be motivated by both the agent's recognition of reasons and a nonrationally induced desire, and (2) when motivation from both sources converges, the motivational energy supplied by the nonrationally induced desire always excludes that supplied by an appreciation of reasons" *ibid*.
 - ⁸ The writers who are most usually taken as representative of this variety of liberal theory are John Rawls (in his work since *A Theory of Justice*, largely collected together in his *Political Liberalism op. cit.*) and Charles Larmore (especially his *Patterns of Moral Complexity op. cit.*). Although theorists such as Stephen Macedo and William Galston have at times disagreed with the anti-perfectionism of Rawls' and Larmore's thought (and indeed disagree about other matters between themselves), they nonetheless both argue for a circumscription of the activities of the liberal state to a more or less political sphere only. For this reason, I think we may be broadly justified in considering them to be 'political liberals' at least in terms of their advocated strategies (as opposed to their justifications for these). Cf. Macedo, S *Liberal Virtues op. cit.* and his rather more Rawlsian 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God vs. John Rawls' *op. cit.*, and Galston, W *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues and Diversity in the Liberal State op. cit.* Useful discussions of the implications which political liberalism has for education are contained in: Strike, KA 'Liberal Discourse and Ethical Pluralism: An Educational Agenda' in *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society* 1992; Callan, E 'Political Liberalism and Political Education' in *Review of Politics* 58 1996 pp. 5-33; Parry, G 'Political Liberalism and Education' in Hampsher-Monk, I and Stanyer, J (eds.) *Contemporary Political Studies* 1996 (Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom) pp. 1697-1708; and Adams, K 'Common Schooling in the Politically Liberal Society: Implications for the Development of Citizens' in *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society* 1997.
 - ⁹ Rawls, J *Political Liberalism op. cit.* p. iv. He grounds this claim upon the idea that there are certain ineliminable 'burdens of judgement' which will mean that disagreement is compatible with full reasonableness on behalf of those disagreeing. Amongst these burdens are; the essential complexity of much evidence, the ways in which the demands of concrete situations tend to outstrip the flexibility of the concepts we use to characterise them, and the influence of the different individual narratives of experience of those in the process of judgement.

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- 10 Larmore, C 'The Limits of Aristotelian Ethics' in *NOMOS XXXIX: Virtue op. cit.* p. 191.
- 11 Rawls, J *Political Liberalism op. cit.* p. 10.
- 12 Dworkin, R 'The Foundations of Liberal Equality' in Peterson, G (ed.) *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (1990, Salt Lake City UT, The University of Utah Press).
- 13 Macedo, S 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God vs. John Rawls' *op. cit.* p. 494.
- 14 Raz, J *Ethics in the Public Domain* p. 60.
- 15 Rawls, J *Political Liberalism op. cit.* pp. 212-54.
- 16 Macedo, S 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God vs. John Rawls' *op. cit.* p. 474.
- 17 Neutrality is understood by political liberals to be achieved if policies are justified in a way which does not appeal to any particular conception or conceptions of the good as opposed to others. Of course, any policy which is neutral in this sense may have differential *effects* upon the adherents of these different conceptions or be more *in line* with what would have been the political implications of certain conceptions were they to have been appealed to. These additional requirements are not, however, usually thought to be of concern in determining whether or not a political action is truly neutral. For further discussion of this topic see Sher, G *Beyond Neutrality* (1997, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) pp. 20-44.
- 18 Rawls, J *Political Liberalism op. cit.* p. 195.
- 19 These criteria are similar but not identical. It is quite imaginable for a political policy to attract the support of all members of the 'overlapping consensus' but do so only by supervening upon their various comprehensive doctrines. If this support is to be consequent upon the operation of public reason alone, this represents a stronger hurdle for the justification of any policy. The fact that the former kind of support often accompanies the latter for reasonable persons is noted by Rawls as a welcome guarantor of social stability rather than as an additional source of justification. It also provides his main reason for arguing that his version of political liberalism represents something more than a mere *modus vivendi* between competing doctrines.
- 20 Rawls, J *A Theory of Justice op. cit.* p. 436. Rawls' recent work sees the 'basicness' of these principles as arising from their historical implication in the shared public culture of liberal societies, rather than from the superiority of any comprehensive moral doctrine.
- 21 As discussed in the previous chapter, MacIntyre argues that a moral tradition can objectively justify claims to its own superiority if it is victorious in a certain kind of inter-traditional intellectual debate. The development of the necessary intellectual resources within traditions can be guaranteed only by the continual possibility that the tradition will be put to the test by adherents of its competitors. The fullest elaboration of this view is contained within MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality? op. cit.*
- 22 Although Rawls is happy to describe the relationship of political liberalism to comprehensive moral doctrines as one of toleration, this is arguably a somewhat ambiguous usage. For if we are to differentiate toleration from disinterest this will be on the grounds that the former involves disapproval of that which is permitted to continue. If this is so, it is hard to see how reasonable (on Rawls' interpretation of this concept) people, on the grounds of public reason, will be able to actually *tolerate* anything other than unreasonable comprehensive doctrines – precisely those which Rawls thinks do not deserve our toleration. It is more likely, therefore, that the kind of toleration which Rawls has in mind is more akin to that of an engineer who is prepared to 'tolerate' a certain degree of error in his or her experimental results whilst maintaining a belief in his or her project.
- 23 Rorty, AO 'The Moral Duty of Promoting Political Conflict' in *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society* 1995 p. 402.
- 24 William Galston, however, claims that the defence of diversity is one of the central defining aims of the liberal political tradition. *Liberal Purposes op. cit.*
- 25 Macedo writes that "[L]iberal civic education is bound to have the effect of favouring some ways of life over others. So be it." *Liberal Civic Education op. cit.* p. 485.
- 26 *ibid.* p. 484.
- 27 At least "for those who live in an autonomy supporting environment [for whom] there is no choice but to be autonomous; there is no other way to prosper in such a society." Raz, J *The Morality of Freedom op. cit.* p. 391.
- 28 Raz, J *Ethics in the Public Domain op. cit.* p. 3.

29 *Ibid.* p. 380.

30 Raz, J *Ethics in the Public Domain op. cit.* p. 119.

31 *ibid.* p. 120.

32 He refers to "... the dangers inherent in the concentration of power in few hands, the dangers of corruption, of bureaucratic distortions and insensitivities, of fallibility of judgement, and uncertainty of purpose." Raz, J *The Morality of Freedom op. cit.* p. 427.

33 *Ibid.* p. 309.

34 Macedo, S *op. cit.* p. 494.

35 See Rorty, AO 'The Social and Political Sources of Akrasia' *op. cit.*

36 Raz, J *Ethics in the Public Domain op. cit.* p. 84.

37 Raz, J *The Morality of Freedom op. cit.* p. 157.

38 MacIntyre, A *How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So op. cit.* p. 7.

39 Williams, B *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (1980, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 81.

40 Raz, J *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics op. cit.* p. 104.



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